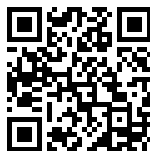


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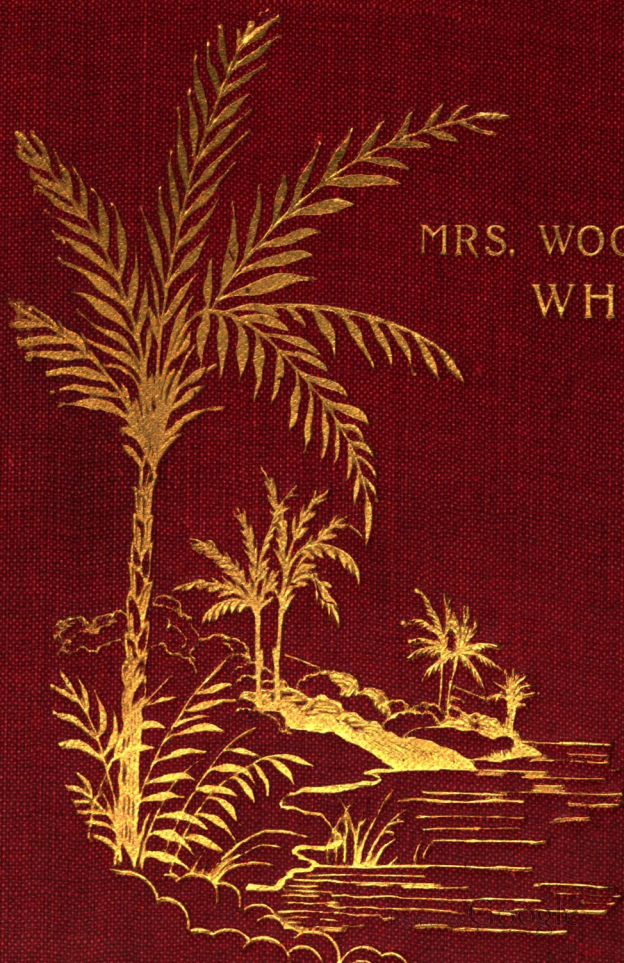
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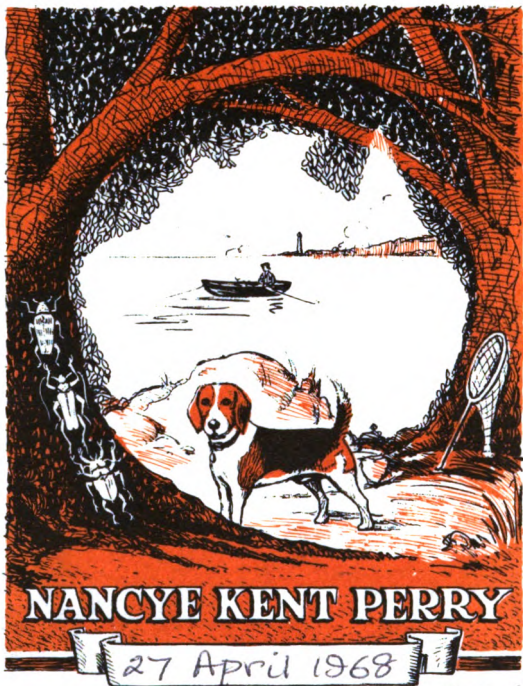


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# M A R A M A.

BY

MRS. WOOLLASTON WHITE.

AUTHOR OF

"A ROMANCE OF POSILIPO"; "LOVE'S CAPTIVE,"  
ETC., ETC.

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# CONTENTS.

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CHAPTER.	PAGE.
I. PIONEERS ARRIVE - - - - -	I
II. TRIBUTE TO VUNI VALU - - - - -	17
III. MOOSA - - - - -	34
IV. THE LALI, AND WHAT IT BETOKENED - - -	47
V. MARY MAKES CONVERSATION AND RECEIVES A CONFIDENCE - - - - -	64
VI. THE PRISONER INTERVIEWED, FIJIAN HONOUR IS SAVED - - - - -	75
VII. RUPERT SHOWS A TALISMAN, AND EXPLAINS THE SITUATION - - - - -	91
VIII. THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS - - - - -	99
IX. FROM MARY'S POINT OF VIEW - - - - -	108
X. PERE JOSEPH'S INSPIRATION - - - - -	121
XI. ROA-ROA - - - - -	132
XII. ANOTHER ARRIVAL - - - - -	152
XIII. VUNI VALU PAYS A VISIT - - - - -	166
XIV. SUSPENSE, AND THE SEQUEL- - - - -	180





# M A R A M A .

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## CHAPTER I.

### PIONEERS ARRIVE.

“Do go on,” said a girl, in beseeching tones. She was listening to a sweet-voiced woman, who sat on a low wicker chair in the verandah of her home in Fiji; the girl was leaning against her, seated on the floor, which was spread with soft Fijian mats.

“This is history and should be written,” urged a gentleman, reclining at a respectful distance, propped upon one of his elbows.

The sun was sinking below the horizon in a firmament of vivid colour; a tender hush lay upon earth, sky, and sea, as if all nature were standing still to watch the orb of day's departure.

Into Mrs. Camden's eyes, still youthful and glowing, came a far-away look that seemed to embrace a wide and varied experience. She was reviewing scenes in which she had taken an active part under different conditions and surroundings.

"The Maori war changed everything for us," she said with a sad movement of her handsome head. The coronet of hair upon it was quite white, contrasting with her brilliant dark eyes, and fine vigorous frame not much past its prime.

"After so many vicissitudes, do you not long to return to a civilized country?" asked the man.

"I am quite satisfied to live and die in my Island home; believe me there are worse places than the land of the Bread-fruit. The life suits us, and we expect to see Rupert take the lead in everything, do we not Mary?"

"Rupert loves Fiji," said the girl, answering only one part of the question. "But go on Marama, Mr. Devon is waiting to hear how you left New Zealand."

"There is really little to tell. War with the Maories had cost us everything but our lives. I shall never forget the night we had to fly abandoning our comfortable homestead to flames. There was barely time to escape; we had reached the stable unseen, we threw ourselves into our saddles and galloped away. My husband carried Rupert, our boy of six years, slung before him; the babe of seven weeks was in my arms. Edward had fastened a leading rein to my horse's bit, and I managed to sit firm till we reached the fortification. We had been warned to come in

there long before, but we expected to tide over the native disturbance as we had on previous occasions. The worst was to come however. No sooner were we in safety, than Rupert's father gathered us to his breast in one fervent embrace, and then rode out to fight shoulder to shoulder with other brave settlers. They succeeded in turning the tide of battle, and drove the rebel natives back to their hills.

We wives endured weeks of suspense—privations did not count—a few delicate women sank out of life, and my sweet baby died."

Mary impulsively put out a hand and caught one of the speaker's ; it was enfolded in Mrs. Camden's warm clasp, as she continued :

"My husband was spared, although he was always where arrows and bullets fell thickest. The joy of his safe return overcame grief for the loss of my babe ; a loss which this dear girl," Mrs. Camden touched Mary's head, "has almost made up to me. When all was quiet, hearing these Islands talked of, and their probable future importance, we decided to try our luck in them.

After saying good-bye to our many friends, we sailed from Auckland with a few other passengers in a wretched brig, which we afterwards knew had been pronounced unseaworthy. The vessel had been chartered by two unscrupulous speculators eager to

induce passengers to embark, and totally indifferent as to what became of us after our money was paid. No adequate provision of food was made, and we had the additional horror of discovering that the supply of water was quite insufficient.

Except for a providentially fair wind and quick passage, we and our live stock of horses and cattle must have perished in great suffering. When we cast anchor in the harbour at Levuka, the captain told me there remained one quart of water on board. Fortunately for us, he was a capital seaman and an honest man. After that trip, he vowed never to sail in the 'Tomahawk' again.

Our first sight of Fiji was like a glimpse of Paradise after the depressing time we had gone through.

Two of our best cows and one horse died on the passage; we feared the rest would be too weak to swim ashore. Our live stock represented the best part of our fortune, which made me watch the operation of landing them with no little anxiety.

The terrified animals were lowered into the sea alongside a boat. My Edward sat in the stern and held the horses heads up by means of a halter attached to each. It was pathetic to see how grateful they were for this help. Twice during the transit our best horse seemed inclined to give up, and make no further efforts. In an instant Ted was in the sea swimming

beside him, giving him support with one arm, as he spoke encouragingly. The effect was wonderful ; all the animals knew and loved the sound of his voice : it gave them confidence, and revived their courage.

Our horned cattle were not so docile, halters were no use with them. Finding themselves adrift in the sea, they struck out wildly in every direction but the right. I thought my husband had escaped Maori spears only to be pierced by the horns of our beasts : he was in and out of the boat, giving chase to stragglers, while the sailors pulled after a group which had faced the shore, and were making for it. As my straining eyes followed the course of his small dark head over the waves, one absorbing desire took possession of me. 'Oh that we were anywhere out of this vast, blue, shining Pacific ! away from its blinding glare of sunlight, its overwhelming heat, its treacherous coral reefs, its fairy islands, their vivid verdure, and, alas for us pioneers ! their undeveloped resources.'

Since we had decided to collect the fragments of our fortune in New Zealand, and put them together again in Fiji, my imagination had been straying over a thriving cotton plantation, stretched over acres of picturesque terraces.

In this vision our plantation *would* present itself ready-made. I could see the close ranks of shrubs abundantly bearing, first their bright yellow blossom,

then the full pods just separating to show a rich crop of pure, sea-island cotton which would eclipse every sample of cotton produced in the States."

Edgar Devon, listening attentively to Mrs. Camden's narrative, raised himself with quickened interest: "Now is the time," he said, "for opening out new plantations. War in the States will put life into a fine activity here: some stimulus is needed to set things humming."

"It has already brought scores of adventurers to spoil our peaceful retreat, and to arouse discontent amongst the natives," Mrs. Camden replied regretfully.

"But," he objected, "the present condition of things cannot last; some better security than native goodwill must be found for lives and property."

"We can talk about that later," was Mary's careless interruption. "Was the live-stock safely landed, and what became of you, Marama?"

"I was left to sit alone upon the scorching deck obliged to wait patiently for the boat's return. By the aid of a strong glass, I was able to watch the sensation created on shore. Natives had congregated on the beach to observe the landing. When the horses were aground, and moved forward, glad to feel their legs on *terra firma*, the Fijians rushed pell-mell into a store, to be out of the way, crushing one

against another in a confused laughing heap. Edward described the scene to me afterwards.

Time passed away, I saw my husband surrounded by a group of settlers wearing white suits of clothing, and broad hats. They escorted him to the verandah of the single hotel, where all sat and smoked, and in my heart I was secretly reproaching him for selfishness. How ashamed I was of myself subsequently! I little guessed how anxiety and care were weighing down his brave spirit, as he sat there battling with disappointment, trying to decide what was best to be done before our slender supply of cash was exhausted.

My impatience became almost uncontrollable when day declined. The whole party had left the verandah, I pictured them sitting down in the hotel to a savoury meal, while the faint gnawing of real hunger gave poignancy to my slow torture of suspense. If I had known how to swim I should have jumped overboard to reach my place by his side or drown in the effort.

I had mentally run through the gamut of reproaches, and subsided into rebellious endurance of what seemed to me a barbarous desertion, when at night-fall the dreary silence was broken by the splash of oars.

‘At last!’ I said, leaning over the bulwark to meet my husband’s eyes.



A tall figure sprang up the gangway, and took off a pandanus-leaf hat.

‘Where is Mr. Camden?’ I asked feeling a tremour through all my veins at the sight of a stranger.

‘He has, I am sorry to say, taken a chill. Illness comes on very suddenly in this climate, and is serious while it lasts; but you must not be frightened; an ‘old hand’ is treating him, and I have brought the boat for you and the boy.’

That was my first meeting with your father, Mary——”

The girl raised her head, passed her disengaged hand quickly over her eyes, as if to get a clearer vision. “I can remember him, he used to carry me, his arms felt so safe and strong.” Mary gave a shivering sigh, as she resumed her former position.

“He helped me to nurse Edward through fever and delirium,” continued Mrs. Camden. “We three became fast friends. My husband recovered, looking like the ghost of himself, and the two men went exploring together. Rupert and I waited in a little hut by the sea; we had two native boys for servants, who used to bolt up a palm-tree whenever I found fault with them. To get palatable food was our difficulty; happily Rupert soon learned to eat *Mundrai* with relish.”

“What is *Mundrai*?” asked Edgar Devon.

"It is a reserve of food for the winter. Every native village has one. A pit is dug, clean and dry, and is lined with banana leaves. Layers of different fruits are then thrown in; bread-fruit, bananas, cocoa-nut, with leaves of dalo between. The pit is closed in with earth and left for six months: the ingredients ferment and mould together, and are cut out in blocks. When the pit is opened, the smell is generally overpowering to Europeans, but children quickly learn to like the mixture.

Fish was our chief resource, I found that the Fijians prepare food with delicacy, using earthen-ware vessels not unlike French *casseroles*. The tiny fish which come to their nets and the coarser kinds are consigned to the *pot au feu*, and left to simmer gently over a charcoal fire . . . But this reminds me! There is to be a gathering of the tribes to-morrow, and we may have white visitors. Mary! will you run over to the cook-house, and superintend Timmie's preparations?"

The slight girlish figure rose silently, and flitted from the verandah; Edgar Devon's eyes followed the shimmer of her white dress till it disappeared within an adjacent building. He had risen at the same time, but a rather imperious movement of Marama's hand invited him to resume his seat.

After a short pause, he said, "Until this evening I thought . . . Mary . . . was your daughter."

"It is quite natural you should have thought so, my aim has been never to let her feel the loss of her own parents."

"Who was her mother?" He asked abruptly.

"She was our friend, John Sinclair's wife."

"Who was John Sinclair's wife before her marriage?" He persisted, with a smile that almost atoned for the rudeness of his question.

"I can't tell you anything of her family, she was *herself*, and that was enough for us; a more charming creature I never met, she was a Spanish-American and good as she was beautiful. Theirs was one of the refined homes in Fiji, and the Sinclairs were too well satisfied with it and with each other to care to seek distractions outside, or to invite guests within. Their reserve gave offence, various romantic stories were invented about them. One was that Sinclair had first seen her, a girl of fifteen, in some wonderful feat of horsemanship; captivated by her singular beauty and sweetness, he married her, and left America to settle in Fiji as a cotton planter.

They had been married nearly three years before their daughter was born. I remember that event as if it were yesterday. Nina had come from her own plantation to be with me; it was arranged that the native *Bui* or accoucheuse should come whenever I sent for her. The chief's permission had to be ob-

tained, and he had passed his word that she should come. No other attendance was to be had.

It so happened that both our husbands had been called away to settle a dispute among the petty chiefs. That night Nina Sinclair and I had gone to rest but neither of us could sleep for anxiety. A frightful storm arose. I got up to go at once to Nina, and found her sitting in the centre room where Timmie, our native servant, little Rupert, and the goat were already congregated. We expected the roof to fall in every moment and I soon saw that the Bui should be sent for. Taking Timmie aside, I said he and Moosa, our best plantation 'hand,' must go for her. Timmie whispered that nothing would bring her out that night, as two rivers were between her and our house.

'You *have* to go Timmie,' was my reply. 'Say to the Chief that *Marama* needs the *Bui*. *Marama's* men will *lead her by the hand*, and will wrap a blanket round her." Leading by the hand is a pledge of good faith with them. I sent a loaf of white bread, and a bottle of cordial as a propitiatory offering.

Timmie and Moosa consented to go. They swam the rivers, and arrived.

The Chief got up when he heard there was a present for him. Timmie offered it with a graceful speech; he told me the whole proceedings on his return. The Chief, Vuni Valu, first tasted the cordial, and gener-

ously gave some to the messengers to warm them after their drenching; then the whole party sat down. Nothing is done in a hurry, *Malua*, wait a while, is their invariably rule.

Vuni Valu listened to Timmie's explanation then gave orders for the Bui to be brought before him. She came quivering in every limb, knowing she was to be sent out during this dreadful storm, when evil spirits are abroad. She began at once, in Vuni Valu's presence, to protest that she could not go. The chief said she must, and he would send two other women with her.

Timmie eloquently spoke of the urgency of the case, he declared the Marama was a *Marama Levu*, a great lady who would take care of her and pay her well, for she was good to all natives, and very, very good to those who worked for her. When Timmie ceased there was silence. The Chief sat motionless as he pondered.

Timmie did not know if he had even heard, as he made no sign.

The poor fellow was beginning to despair, when Vuni Valu looked up, took the pipe from his lips, and with a gesture full of dignity he uttered one word, 'Go.'

The Bui started forward, and cast herself down before him in mute supplication.

When a Chief has given his word, he *cannot* break it, 'Go,' was the sole response.

Then she meekly arose, and held out her hands to the messengers."

"Did they get across?" asked Edgar Devon who was absorbed in the narrative.

"I am going to tell you how it was done. Before entering the first swollen stream, the men placed a strong bamboo under the Bui's chest, the ends were made fast to their shoulders: the men swam, she had only to lean well over her bamboo. She kept repeating the Lord's prayer to calm her terror. The poor old creature had been a cannibal in her youth!

When the party arrived drenched and shivering, the Bui looked to me like a galvanized skeleton, with hands like the claws of a falcon. I knew however she was most skilful. We had a fire lighted in an old camp oven for safety, and some tea ready in case they should come.

The Bui refused all food, her idea was that she must take nothing until the expected infant was born. This was a remnant of her Fijian religion, to propitiate the Deity.

I told the Bui she was not to be afraid of us at all. She thought I was a great Princess, and if Nina died, her own life would be the forfeit.

I said "You must treat her as if she were a Fiji woman like one of yourselves."

The thunder rolled and lightning seemed to envelop us in flames : peals and flashes were continuous.

The native woman who accompanied the Bui however went out, and returned with some herbs which she mixed and Nina drank the potion. All knelt ; the Lord's prayer was repeated in the native tongue. It was very touching and gave us confidence.

At length after our terrible night we had the joy of hearing little Mary's lusty cries. The Bui managed her perfectly. Notwithstanding anxiety and fatigue, I could scarcely help laughing at Bui's face when she looked at the clothes provided, then turned to me.

'Don't,' she said, 'tire the little thing by putting all that on, it wants rest as well as its mother.'

So saying she cleverly folded a piece of flannel *sulu* fashion, over the tiny limbs, and gave the babe to Nina.

When all was over the woman said two verses of a hymn of thanksgiving, and took some tea with food. Daylight came, and they were eager to get back to their village, as the storm had abated.

I gave the Bui a new red blanket, twelve yards of calico, and a mosquito curtain of white muslin, with a mauve flower upon it which enchanted her. A look of intense satisfaction and gratitude lighted up her withered old face. 'Now I shall have peace, and can sleep at night,' she said. Her village was near a mangrove swamp where mosquitoes abound."

"I could sit listening to your reminiscences for ever!" Edgar Devon declared when Mrs. Camden paused.

"It is very kind of you to be so easily entertained, but I must reserve anything else you care to hear for another occasion. Shall we see you to-morrow? The tribes bring in a tribute to their king, who happens to be my friend, Vuni Valu. The sight will be very picturesque, and as Rupert is absent, Mary and I will be glad to have your escort."

"Thank you so much, then may I call here for you?"

"Yes, come early, and do not forget your white umbrella, the sun will be dazzling even then."

Devon took up his pandanus-leaf hat reluctantly, he glanced towards the "cook-house" into which Mary had been despatched.

"How long has Miss Sinclair been an orphan?" he inquired, "her parents must have died very young."

"Yes, indeed, they were in their youth," Marama answered sadly, "but, excuse me, I will not speak of our loss now."

Edgar Devon took the hand Mrs. Camden extended, and held it respectfully while he spoke. "Forgive me for approaching the subject, you do not know how interesting is your society, and your Fijian life to an outsider. Good night, Marama. May I call you as Miss Sinclair does?"

"She gives me the native's title—great Lady—my



own son does also, or I should be 'mother' to the whole native population; as it is they persist in calling her *Melili*."

"Melili," he repeated softly, "there's magic in the sound: how it suits her! While in Fiji, let me adopt the native names!"

"From English lips we prefer our own," replied Mrs. Camden rather coldly. "Good night," she added more cordially, we shall expect you to-morrow."

"Thanks, I shall not fail to be here." Releasing her hand, he left the verandah with the deliberate grace that marked all his movements. Before passing out of sight in the grove of cocoa-nut palms, he turned to look back, and raised his hat again. His hostess was standing where he had left her, an expression of perplexity upon her fine countenance. He was too far away to perceive that, nor could he guess her half-whispered thoughts:

"With all his charm, what is it that I do not like about him at times? Does one grow suspicious of cultured men when long cut off from their society? I never intended to show him more than the ordinary hospitality we colonists always extend to our countrymen in a strange land, yet after a few weeks this has drifted into intimacy. I suppose the chief reason is that Rupert has not been at home to take him off our hands."

## CHAPTER II.

### TRIBUTE TO VUNI VALU.

A COOL night breeze freshened the air, it came at intervals in swift soft gusts, rocking the tops of tall palms, and rustling the leaves of flowering shrubs, which bowed gracefully at its approach. Waves rushed in to shore and broke in showers of silvery spray.

The night was short, and nature subsided into stillness when the fierce hot sun sprang up kindling sky and sea with a glorious golden sheen. He affected no coy coquetting behind wreaths of mist, no shades, nor neutral tints surrounded him; he rose swiftly upon the scene and bathed creation in a blaze of dazzling light. The sea swayed and sparkled under his beams, the rocks looked like gilded bulwarks to Fairyland; the islands stood out in pre-Raphaelite distinctness, every bush and tree touched by his magic.

Mary Sinclair's face was animated like the scene, as she and Marama, attended by Edgar Devon, strolled leisurely under the shade of big white cotton umbrellas in the direction taken by all the settlers of the district.

After walking for half an hour, they arrived at the

edge of a basin-shaped valley, an outlet was at the head, and a low round hill rose opposite.

Vuni Valu and his court were already upon the spot to receive the white settlers. Native servants led them to the best places from which to observe all that passed. The company was seated upon fine mats, in rows, to form a semi-circle at the entrance of the valley; the native band was stationed near.

"If we are too close, we can move away presently without giving offence," said Mary to her companion, who examined musicians and instruments with great curiosity.

About twenty Herculean natives, strongly scented with cocoa-nut oil, which glistened on their smooth skins, were squatting upon the grass. Each man held a bamboo reed, which gave a different sound according to its size, when he struck the cane sharply upon the ground with both hands. Some pipes were very large, and required no little energy to manipulate.

Ploom-pa-toom, ploom-pa-toom, ploom, ploom, ploom, was slowly boomed forth by the orchestra, while the company waited for an imaginary curtain to rise.

A numerous native audience reclined in rows forming a separate semi-circle to the left of the Europeans; they kept up a ceaseless flow of talk in their liquid

accents, broken by peals of merry laughter that rang in the clear atmosphere from buoyant hearts.

"They seem to treat the business of paying tribute as a grand joke," was Edgar's remark.

"Fijians never allow anything to weigh upon their spirits, and they get a fair share of amusement out of this, as you will see," Marama answered.

Suddenly the music ceased, but the babble of tongues rose louder, until it was hushed by an authoritative gesture from the King, who looked solemnly around, as if to claim attention to an impressive rite.

The rippling laughter died away, but white teeth gleamed in smiles of delight when a sound of distant voices could be heard. The harmony rose and fell in weird, wild cadence not unlike something the stranger had heard before. Gazing eagerly out, he looked for the singers; none were visible, although their untutored melody came wafted nearer and nearer.

There was not a sign nor a movement, save the trembling shimmer of heat against the brow of the hill.

"Here they come!" As Mary spoke, two figures appeared upon its summit, their forms defined in bold relief: they were followed by another pair, another, till a whole procession was winding downward airily and gracefully, their elastic steps scarce seeming to

touch the earth. They were young men and maidens, the flower of the tribe.

The gorgeous sunlight fastened on them, scintillating a shower of brightness from something that shone like frosted silver: it wound among their waving hair, it glittered amid flowers with which their bodies were entwined. It floated gauzy as a dragon-fly's wing from their wreathed arms and shoulders; it fell in feathery plumes from their heads.

The spectators watched in charmed silence, until Edgar murmured; "are they singing a hymn?"

"It is a garbled echo of one," said Marama, "but some of the notes are quite their own. This is a *meke* or legend which they chant as they dance; men and women do not mix, except on rare occasions, in these dances. Women have special dances of their own, all in perfect time, they go through the various figures like one body worked by machinery."

"Where do they get all that silvery gauze?"

"They ruin the young cocoa-nuts to obtain it; before the palm flowers, they open the pods, and from an inner lining peel off this delicate tissue which they make into ornaments to trim their hair and bodies on gala days."

"Where are their offerings?"

"No one knows but themselves, the aim of each is to hide his gift until it is presented."

The light agile steps advanced, till the features of each mover in the group could be distinguished; all were composed to gravity, but wonderful gleams of vivacity flashed from their eyes.

Plum-a-tum,-tum,-tum, was softly suggested by the band which began an accompaniment to the movements of advancing feet. The foremost couple were now nearly opposite the receiver of tribute; they evidently felt themselves to be the cynosure of the assemblage, and liked the sensation.

No one could fail to admire the supple easy grace of the native girl, many a ball-room *belle* would have given her jewels to be able to manage her arms as did this dark Hebe, in whom strength was united to grace. Her short variegated skirt descended to her knees, thence to the ankles, the silvery trimming shone in bands that closely clasped the brown skin, from neck to waist was a loose bodice of the same material as her tunic. Flowers clung and clustered about her as if they rejoiced to show their own beauty and hers by force of contrast. A murmur of applause greeted her, when she dropped on one knee softly as though she sank on velvet, and holding one rounded arm arched over her head, she produced in the other a large coconut, out of which to all appearance grew a tiny tree of its own species, with tapering stem and tuft of leaves.

"Ah," said Marama quickly, "Kukemba has filled her casket with fine oil, and has cut the little palm to fix in as a cork."

Kukemba smiled with child-like pleasure at the sensation she created: passing swiftly aside, she made way for her successors, who came rapidly forward to present their gifts in the order and precision of a dance; women passing on one side of the receiver, men to the other. Some approached triumphantly, holding both arms in elegant attitudes, causing the audience to wonder where their offering could be hidden. Then as they bent the knee a waving movement would disclose it, wreathed in a garland, or drawn from the fold of the dress.

Several bottles of English make containing coconut oil had been deposited at the receiver's feet, and removed by native servants, when attention was attracted by a young athlete, whose haughty features wore a half-scornful expression, when he glanced towards the white settlers.

"Musandroka disdains white people," Mary said in a low voice.

"Disdains?! " echoed the visitor, with an intonation that made Marama smile.

"You think, perhaps, the natives are bound to admire us?" she asked.

"Certainly, how could they do otherwise?"

"I assure you that our pale faces appear to them at first quite repellant, they look upon our lack of colour as a kind of deformity."

By some sympathetic electricity Musandroka's bearing gave the musicians their cue, they quickened the time, the *ploom*, *ploom*, *ploom* boomed louder and faster.

With a gay pirouette he sprang into the air as if he shook off the coils of a serpent.

"Hullo, what next?" Edgar Devon muttered, with a look of admiration. "I suppose your snakes in Fiji are harmless?"

"Yes, if you let them alone ; they are too lazy to be troublesome, and sleep most of the time, but it would be impossible to wake that fellow up to mischief;" Mary laughingly declared.

Edgar got up to look at the reptile, and then perceived that it was a long, leathery piece of seaweed which Musandroka had filled with oil and fastened at both ends. The young chieftain motioned imperiously to his followers, they quickly advanced, put down their gifts, and, led by him, filed off to begin their dance in real earnest. The musical reeds were wielded with brisk energy to keep pace with the dancers.

"'Tis a wonderful *ballet*, what colour, grace and animation! What marvellous agility, what pliant limbs!"

Edgar Devon might well say so. Each intricate



change of steps was executed with a nicety that would have put European dancers to shame ; few could emulate the rapidity, the fleetness, the lithe leaps, the soft elegance of these Fijians, as they flitted here and there forming themselves into picturesque groups. Their even teeth gleamed white, their eyes flashed like jewels, and the silver sheen of their ornaments threw off the sun's rays in jets of dewy light.

Now the men shot off like a flight of arrows to the opposite side of the arena ; standing there in line, and bending low, each struck one of his hands upon the hollowed palm of the other with a sound like castanets ; while the women floated in undulating movements, weaving arms and hands into mystic combinations full of grace and decorum.

Then they turned to face their banished partners as if won by the charm of their palm music. Another meteor-like rush, and a sudden stop of music, feet, and limbs brought the first dance to an end. There were no stragglers, none shot out beyond the others. It was as if the whole were governed by one spring.

"*Vinaka ! vinaka ;*" (good, good) said Mrs Camden clapping her hands. The applause was echoed, as Musandroka led off his satellites, the men following him in single file to their seats among the native audience ; while Kukemba, the donor of the cocoa-nut casket was followed by her maidens to their side

of the arena ; to watch, and applaud the next set coming in with contributions.

Another stream of human life was flowing over the hill top into the valley. Fresh voices took up the chant, each different party gave their own *meke*.

Marama might have been their queen, so eagerly did they accept any sign of appreciation from her.

"Your voice acts as a talisman among these people, how have you obtained such influence over them?" her guest inquired.

"We have always dealt honourably with the natives," she answered simply. "My husband made a point of never deceiving them. His was quite different to the usual system of dealing with them. Most white-settlers are harsh, with the idea of keeping them down. Some planters have struck their labourers with a whip. I must tell you one day a terrible consequence of that. We have always treated ours with kindness, and with the consideration and forbearance we should show our children. They have hitherto repaid us with affection. We have never tricked them, nor abused their confidence."

"But I am told they think nothing of killing a *papalangi* (foreigner) and laying claim to the land he occupies," objected Edgar.

"I know of one such case ; the purchaser had got it from a chief who had no power to sell. Still," added

Mrs. Camden pensively, "I do foresee troubles ahead about the land. The money given for it to the natives is soon gone, and they find that the land remains with the foreigner for ever."

"His only security at present is the good-will of this native King!"

"Yes, Vuni Valu, or the Root of War, as his name signifies, holds all the other chiefs in check; they are his subjects, and must obey his laws."

"I fancy his reign will be short," said Edgar Devon with rather a cynical smile. "The country must be placed under more reliable government. I want an excuse to linger in Fiji, it is such a novel experience, even to a traveller like myself. I shall offer my services as secretary or Prime Minister, and transact Vuni Valu's business with the settlers."

"The merchants manage all that," said Marama, somewhat startled at this proposition. Then treating it as a jest she continued "I don't think you need make any change in your plans for the sake of that experiment, for I feel sure a week would see you in, and out, of office!"

"Time will show," was his answer. Marama could not hear it, so deafening just then was the noise of the native band.

The dance going forward was executed entirely by men, and every nerve and muscle in the musicians'

bodies seemed to quiver in sympathy. Edgar expected to see them fling away their instruments to take part in what looked like a warrior's demonstration, but their excitement found vent in the frantic manipulation of the bamboo pipes which gave forth a volume of sound. The men did not stir from their places. At a sign from the king, the whole pageant stopped as if by magic. "Bravo! or more correctly *bravi*. I see they understand discipline," was Edgar's remark.

"Yes, in many ways our dusky neighbours are an example to us," Marama said heartily. "I often think we have much to learn from them: some of their strict customs are admirable. But these are refined exercises compared with some I have witnessed on our distant plantation. During my husband's absence I used to encourage our hired labourers to dance in the evening."

"Was not that a dangerous experiment?" Edgar asked in astonishment.

"It turned out very well. I must tell you they were a mixed company; there were men from Apii, Solomon, Tanna, Lagoon and Sandwich islands. They might have quarrelled unless they had been amused. Their own rules of etiquette made it feasible, because two parties are never allowed to dance at the same time; one party only; the others look on. I used to reward them with pieces of tobacco, and those

not engaged in the *meke* were allowed to cook yams for refreshment."

Edgar Devon pictured to himself this elegant lady in her white dress presiding at such an entertainment!

"The Solomon islanders," she continued, "have the best idea of music, and the most graceful movements. A column of men, two and two, go swaying, lissom as snakes, along the grass armed with tomahawks, their bows, arrows, and spears upon their backs. I was secretly a little afraid of the Tanna men, they are the most fierce, warlike, and quarrelsome. We were obliged to give them quarters of their own quite apart from the others. During their exercises they used to utter blood-curdling shouts and cries. Apii men put everybody in good humour. They stand round in a ring with heads hanging, gradually close the circle till their heads almost touch, they then kick frantically out behind, waving their arms. It is done so quickly one cannot distinguish legs from arms. It provoked merry laughter, and I used to dismiss them all to their *vattas* in perfect good temper."

"What are *vattas*?"

"They are reed tables used for spreading cotton in the sun; we provided them also for our men to sleep on. Each set had their own houses, their *vattas* and mats, and fresh grass."

"Did you manage these people for any length of time alone?"

"For some months: it was to save my husband's life. He became so ill, he must have died without a change of climate. For a long time he refused to be separated from his family; at length he yielded to my entreaties, and went to Sydney. A message was sent to me to go into Levnka, but we had not then the means to live here; besides it would have been to abandon our property, so I remained. Anybody would have done the same under like circumstances."

"Pardon," said Edgar, "very few women could have found the courage to do as much."

"It was not so perilous as you think. My husband had trained our men to regard me with almost superstitious respect: some of them were Catholics like ourselves: we could always depend upon their obedience, and their example influenced the others. Still had we known what was going to happen later, that trip to Sydney would never have been taken; and I—should—then—have *seen* my husband die—."

Marama's voice vibrated with emotion, then sank into silence; her eyes turned towards the sea with a look of strange, deep yearning.

Edgar Devon roused himself from his half reclining attitude and sat straight up under his umbrella.

"May I hear what *did* happen?" he asked in a low tone full of sympathetic interest.

"I cannot speak of that time now," she said after a pause. "Perhaps on another occasion I may tell you something about it. See, the tribes are going back to their canoes, there will be a flotilla skimming over the bay presently. I must do my duty to the settlers; will you come and help me to entertain some of the party?"

"I will do anything you command, except let you off that recital at some future time," he replied, rising at once.

The natives were going their way one after another, the sexes keeping in separate companies. They formed in their gala dress a long, bright chain of human links stretched over a scene of surpassing beauty. Rock, water, palms, large-leaved shrubs, flowers of vivid tints lent their aid to charm the eye. Upon the ear came back echoes of mellow voices and laughter.

Mary was watching the departure.

"How they gossip and chatter," she remarked to Mr. Devon who came up with the message from Marama. "Happily it is all good-tempered, they don't quarrel much, and they say very witty things."

"Have we now to go and see the white company sit round a leg of mutton like cannibals?" he asked with a glance of comic disdain at one or two rough specimens of the superior race.

"I don't think that I have ever seen a whole leg of mutton on our table," was her matter-of-fact reply. "Sheep do not thrive here like the goats; we depend upon kid and poultry for meat, and we do not see too much of it I can tell you," she added laughing.

"These settlers are so common beside Mrs. Camden and you! They look the sort of persons who would chop spinach on their plates, with a great clatter of knives."

"Is it vulgar to chop your green vegetables?" Mary asked innocently.

"Well, it is not usually done at table."

"But when the leaves are not minced sufficiently before they are served?"

"I think I should *leave* them," he rejoined smilingly.

"Perhaps people are never really hungry in England; we are in Fiji, and I must often have chopped my spinach," she confessed with a lovely blush, "only with us it is taro, not spinach, the leaves are a delicacy in which we do not often indulge, the root of the plant is our chief food."

"You could never be vulgar," he said with conviction.

"But you have just shown that I am; and now I shall not feel at my ease before you any more; still, please tell me all the other awkward things you notice."



"My answer is that in the first place Miss Sinclair could not be awkward if she tried ; secondly, I value her good opinion far too much to risk offending her by any officious remarks."

"Marama scarcely ever finds fault with me, and Rupert never, so I must be what you would call conceited and spoilt."

"When did I ever say anything so untrue !"

"It would be rude—even in Fiji—to say it in so many words," she answered merrily, "but you have a clever way of making me feel ignorant and clumsy."

"I would not, for worlds, see you otherwise than as you are," he said with fervour.

"Because you would lose the fun of laughing at me," was Mary's parting shot, as she sped away over the grass in response to a signal from her foster-mother.

Mary's simplicity baffled all compliments. During his thirty years of life Edgar Devon had not met her like ; he found it easier to talk to Mrs. Camden than to this quick-witted girl of sixteen.

They were joined by the group of white settlers, and their wives, who gladly accepted Marama's hospitality for half the day.

The repast in itself was a study, being a mixture of native fruits and dishes, combined with more solid European fare. It was served and eaten with enough refinement to make Edgar feel somewhat ashamed of

his criticism. In the brisk exchange of anecdotes he gave his best, and received various new lights cast on Fijian life by the settlers' unconventional chat.

Towards evening the guests took leave, he lingered on. Wicker chairs were out on the verandah; Marama took possession of hers with a sigh of relief; this hour of calm was always an enjoyment to her. Over her features came the dreamy, far-away look that Mary had learned to associate with many a thrilling story.

She dropped into her favourite attitude upon the soft Fijian mat spread beside the elder lady's chair.

"Marama," she began coaxingly, "Mr. Devon wants to hear more about the Tanna men; tell him of Moosa."

## CHAPTER III.

### MOOSA.

EDGAR wondered if he were now going to learn some detail of the hidden tragedy which he had begun to suspect must under-lie Mrs. Camden's calm existence. He gave one swift glance at her face, but saw upon it no trace of the emotion she had shown when speaking of her husband's illness.

"Poor Moosa," she began, "yes, he was one of our Tanna labourers, and lived with the others of his tribe; he had been ailing for a long time, but steadily refused any remedy we tried to offer. One night it was raining hard—as it can rain in Fiji—! and I had forgotten to give an order to Timmie, our *chef-de-cuisine*, so went over to the cook-house. I don't know why it should be so called instead of kitchen," she said smiling in answer to a look of inquiry from one of her auditors, "but we never seem to use the word kitchen in Fiji. On my way back I was startled by an apparition, that caused me to stop short as if my feet were rooted to the spot.

Looming out of the darkness was something like a

human form, supporting itself on long lean, black bones, that seemed to do duty for arms. Was it human? I asked myself with an involuntary shudder.

I turned to Timmie who was beside me as escort; he stood like a bronze statue, the colour of his face changed to a sort of sage green. We then became aware of a pair of eyes, starting from hollow sockets fixed appealingly upon us. After a moment of silence Timmie gasped out half in relief, half in terror, the single word 'Moosa!'

I called to Edward, and on hearing my voice the poor, dark skeleton writhed and made feeble efforts to crawl away.

In a very short time my husband and I were bending over him trying to understand what had happened to the unfortunate creature.

'He is too far gone to speak,' my Edward said, putting his strong arms round, and raising the helpless figure.

We administered brandy and egg, a teaspoonful at a time; Moosa's eyes, glowing like live coals, turned from Edward's face to mine with a most piteous expression. By degrees we were able to grasp the situation.

Moosa's countrymen, the men from Tanna, believing him to be at the point of death had put him out in the rain to die. They had told Moosa that as they

had still to dwell for two years in that house—until the time their agreement expired, and they would be returned to their own island, from which they had been taken by traders—he could on no account be permitted to die; because if he did, not one of the inmates could cross the threshold again. So out the dying man had to go.

Filled with indignation, Edward hurried away to demand an explanation from the Tanna men. He was thoroughly roused, and his remonstrances were made more telling by the aid of sundry cuffs and shakes dealt out with equal fearlessness and impartiality. The great fierce group were too much astonished to do anything except gesticulate, and exclaim in their deep, guttural tones. They thought the *Turanga* (lord) must be suddenly crazed, and when they heard him give orders that Moosa was to be tended day and night, some broke into a laugh of incredulity.

We had to give an example ourselves, and having prepared a room for him adjoining the cook-house, we sat up with him that night. Moosa was a most patient sufferer, but in spite of all we could do he grew weaker. At first he was almost alarmed at our care, I suppose he thought our motive might be sinister, but very soon he learned to trust us implicitly, and his looks of deep gratitude when either of us were with him went to our hearts.

I could not bear to see him die a heathen, and tried to tell him that it was the *Lotu Katolika* (Catholic religion) which made us kind to all men. I said, it is the *Lotu ndina* (true religion).

I asked Moosa if he would embrace it, and be our brother, the child of the great Creator whose Son Jesus came down to die for our sins, and open Heaven to us. I took my silver crucifix from my neck, and held it to his lips after first kissing it myself.

‘*Eo, eo, vinaka sara* ; yes, yes, very good,’ he answered with eagerness that seemed to put life into him.

‘Then let me pour water upon your head, to cleanse your spirit, it is the sign of salvation.’

‘*Eo, eo,*’ he said again, as he leaned his head towards me.

With feelings of awe and joy, I took water, made the sign of the Cross over it, and three separate times poured some over the fore part of his reverent dark head, saying aloud, ‘John Moosa, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.’ At each of the Holy Names I dipped my shell into the water and poured it on him. When I afterwards signed his brow, he sank back, murmuring, ‘*Lotu Katolika, Lotu ndina . . . . vinaka sara.*’

Those were his last words, he had become unable to swallow nourishment of any kind, but lingered for

some hours unconscious. It was during Timmie's watch that Moosa breathed his last. I came in just as he had passed away, and gently closed his eyes. Timmie looked on with mingled feelings that were reflected on his face; he had never seen a dying man tended before, and evidently had not made up his mind whether it was commendable or not.

I fell upon my knees beside poor Moosa, and clasping my hands began to pray with fervour that astonished myself. I felt as if drawn after him into the kingdom of souls, where are no barriers of territory or race. Following him, my mind was as if lifted upon wings into a region of splendour and peace. I was conscious of a strong spiritual bond between my soul and that which had taken flight. Tears were in my eyes, but they were tears of joy, for a vision seemed to fill them, of Moosa's reception before the "great White Throne." A great calm came over my own spirit, all the miseries, and cares of our daily life were for the time forgotten. Indeed I took no heed of time during that vigil beside Moosa's remains. I was indescribably happy.

The swift, soft tread of native feet aroused me suddenly. A whole company was round the house; the doorway was darkened by a crowd of bronze faces. My husband was standing by me, and laid his hand upon my shoulder with a firm clasp. As our

eyes met, I saw astonishment in his. Life among the natives had taught us to repress all signs of emotion ; it might have been mistaken by them for weakness or timidity.

Edward looked at me almost sternly.

‘Go now,’ he said, ‘leave me to do the rest ; the Tanna fellows have come to bury Moosa.’

‘We must do that ourselves,’ I answered, ‘he died a Catholic.’

A quick flash of alarm came into my husband’s eyes ; for a moment he thought my mind was unhinged.

The natives now broke silence, their deep, rapid tones sounded angry and discontented.

‘It is too late to make any change,’ my husband said quickly, ‘Timmie came to the plantation where we were all at work, he told me Moosa was dead, and I then ordered the Tanna men to assemble, addressed them, and told them to bury their countryman with every care and respect according to the fashion of his Island. It must now be done as I said, and I shall see it through.’

Then my husband turned to the natives. They listened again in silence while he gave them a short harangue. He told them they could have the coverings of Moosa’s bed, and anything else they required for the purpose of burial.

Directly he ceased speaking, Jap-*pan*, their leader’s



loud, harsh voice burst forth in the broken English he had picked up.

“What for no makee *kai-kai*? (food.) All a same as white man. *Kai-kai!* no bury.”

*Kai-kai* is the New Zealand word for food, we always used it in speaking to our Fijians. A hum of approval, seconded this proposal that Moosa should be eaten, not buried. There were a few murmurs of dissent from Jap-*pan*'s assertion that he would be equal in flavour to a white man, but the whole party appeared eager to taste.

Our sensations can be better imagined than described.

‘As long as you are here, you shall follow our customs,’ said my husband, ‘we do not eat our fellow-men, nor do we turn them out under torrents of rain, to die.’

His stern tones warned the Tanna men that his spirit was rising; his determination was a moral force that bore their will down before it, and, backed by his cool courage, had never yet failed to control them. As for me, I had suddenly turned cold as ice notwithstanding the height of the thermometer; this dreadful manifestation of latent cannibalism, under such a revolting form, came upon me too unexpectedly.

It was no time to show weakness of any sort. I sent up a wild prayer for help, and sat down upon the

stem of a fallen palm-tree which happily was near, for I felt my knees giving way under this new horror.

Edward lost not a moment, he took the lead ordering the men to follow him. He first chose a roll of new calico from our store, for Moosa's winding sheet, and superintended the funeral rites himself.

The Tanna men raised their dead comrade into a sitting position, drawing the arms to embrace the knees; then proceeded to wind and swathe him in that attitude. They brought his knife, his pipe and tobacco pouch saying he would want them directly he awoke in his own country, to which they believed his spirit had returned.

They prepared short poles sharpened at one end, and went with these in hand to choose a spot for the grave. That done, they ranged themselves in a circle round it; two men to each pole. One raised and plunged the implement deep into the earth as he began to intone a weird, yet thrilling dirge: his companion seized the pole and levered up the soil chanting in response. So the work went swiftly on till a deep pit was dug; into it they lowered and carefully fitted the body with great nicety. Green boughs they had previously brought were laid over. A pile of huge stones had also been collected. I was watching operations at a distance. Edward had not allowed me to remain with him.

My anxiety deepened into intense fear when each man took up a stone.

Did they mean to turn upon my husband, and kill him as he stood there firm and cool, looking so slight in the midst of those giants !

The men backed about twenty yards from the grave, rushed forward and flung the stones into it with all their mighty strength ; then covered the mould in quickly, and joining hands jumped and danced vigorously, to keep Moosa down, they said, otherwise he might get up and disturb their peace. They concluded the burial rites by bringing a vessel of water and some fresh bananas ; these were placed upon the grave. Then the natives looked round at my husband with the air of men who had done more than their duty. One would have thought they had achieved a sublime act of self-denial."

"It is almost incredible !" was Edgar Devon's remark ; " we all know that cannibals eat their enemies slain in battle ; but surely not one of their own tribe dying as Moosa did."

"The same objection struck us both afterwards, not at the time ; for I have related the scene exactly as it happened ; only all was much more real and vivid than words can describe. We never alluded to the subject, nor made any inquiries. It is, however, quite possible that the demonstration was made to frighten

us; if my husband had not acted with perfect coolness the Tanna men would probably have mutinied and killed us both, for they were terribly excited on that occasion."

"Yes, I can understand they owed Mr. Camden a grudge for his interference in their treatment of Moosa, and would like to have made him quail."

"One must never quail before a native," said Marama proudly; "that was the lesson this scene taught me, and if I had not taken it to heart, I should not have been sitting here chatting with you in the twilight," she added with her fascinating smile.

"Marama!" broke in Mary's eager voice, "do let us hear now of the attack upon Nuku Balavu, you have never yet told me that," she urged persuasively.

"My child, why should I tell you what might make you nervous when we go to live there again."

"But we never shall live there; and I wish Rupert would sell the place 'right away!'"

"He knows my heart is set upon going back."

"Oh, Marama, why?"

"Because my husband worked, suffered and braved so much for that beautiful property, that he might leave an inheritance to our son. And my Edward may be, yes, he *may be* still somewhere in that region, Who knows . . . . beyond the mountains . . . . in the

hands of natives . . . they would never dare to kill him ! He may be still their prisoner . . . .”

Mary's arm stole softly round Marama, and clasped her tenderly.

“Dearest, Rupert says you must not cling to that idea. No one except yourself has any hope that *he* is yet alive; even Père Joseph says it is impossible.”

“Where are the proofs?” Marama asked in firm low tones. “Without proof, why am I to believe that my husband is dead?”

“It is certain that he had put out to sea,” Mary whispered, “and *that* hurricane was the worst ever known by the oldest settler. The natives speak of it yet with fear, and it happened long ago.”

“A very short span at my time of life !” Marama answered, with her sweet, sad smile. “God's Holy Will be done,” she crossed herself devoutly; “I rejoice if he has gained the Haven . . . but there are times when I think I shall again hear my dear one's step. He may come in the dusk, or at dawn. . . .”

“At dawn in the life to come; not on this side of Heaven, Marama darling.”

There was a slight tremour in Mary's voice as she made this reply; she had sunk upon her knees, her head resting on her foster-mother's shoulder.

Both remained silent for some moments.

Edgar Devon thought they were in prayer. He

moved quietly away, stepping quickly and lightly upon the steep path which led down to the beach. Then slowly he sauntered back to his hotel among the quaint collection of houses that formed the township, deeply touched by the pathos which surrounded the lives of these two.

When Timmie's wife, carrying a white bundle of breeze-scented linen upon her head, came across from her dwelling, followed by her two little children, her ladies were still in the verandah just as their last guest had left them.

Sura-waia could hear Marama's voice speaking in low earnest tones.

As neither lady looked up Sura-waia entered in silence; her chubby, bronze-limbed babies sank on the grass to wait, at a respectful distance, till their mother should finish her duties within. They sat with their legs crossed under them, their little hands lightly clasped, pictures of perfect ease: their big, round eyes so clear and bright darted everywhere in eager curiosity.

The fowls were going to roost lingeringly, as if it were rather a mistake, now that the earth was cool. The skinny long-legged hens had spent most of the day standing in disconsolate groups, with parted beaks and drooping wings, quite out of conceit with themselves and the climate. The children now and

then gave a subdued sound with their lips to hasten the stragglers' movements.

When their mother re-appeared, she paused before her mistress silently waiting for orders.

"*Sa lakki moce*," Mary said to her.

It was the Fijian good-night, and means "go to sleep."

"*Roa-roa (till to-morrow)*," was the reply. So saying the comely young mother went her way. Up jumped the children at her approach, the eldest spied something on the grass; he quickly dashed out one foot to pick up the object with his toes, thus bringing it to the level of his hand without the trouble of stooping. It was only an empty cotton reel but he would get as much amusement out of it as if he were a kitten.

Twilight faded swiftly into night; a profound stillness settled over Marama's peaceful homestead. All were soon sleeping except herself. She lay listening, listening, and the waves below made soft monotonous music as they swept up to the coral rocks to break over them in showers of silvery spray.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LALI, AND WHAT IT BETOKENED.

It is generally the unexpected that happens. Week after week slipped away, Edgar Devon had ceased even to talk of leaving Fiji. He applied himself to a serious study of the language, and made rapid progress under the old French priest's direction; at the same time he neglected no opportunity of conciliating the native chiefs. Père Joseph was not insensible to the visitor's charm of manner and speech. Edgar had learned to speak French in his childhood during his parents' residence in France, Père Joseph had bid farewell for ever to the beloved land of his birth, but to speak of it was a joy.

In the flower of early manhood he had left father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends, home, country and civilization to be a voluntary exile, in order to carry the Faith to the heathen, to devote to them his whole life without any thought of return. He had come to labour, and "to lay his bones among the Fijians of his flock."

Edgar's admiration and respect went out at once to



the apostle whose ascetic life presented to his critical mind a sharp contrast to that of emissaries of various types and creeds, who appeared to requisition most things they wanted.

Père Joseph's boat was built by his own hands with assistance from brother Pierre, he asked for nothing and took nothing. Devon knew little of Catholic dogma, but was forcibly struck by Père Joseph's widely different method of treating with the natives. He had no difficulty in believing Marama when she said that the effect of Père Joseph's example and teaching was one that *remained*.

Evening talks upon the verandah had become an agreeable habit. Edgar's tact and delicacy kept him from appearing there too often ; he was at this time more anxious to win Mrs. Camden's esteem than to gratify his own inclination, which would have led him to seek her society every day, since there was his only chance of seeing Mary. He had not made any further discoveries concerning her parents, Marama had not again alluded to the subject, and disregarded all his hints.

Mary had not forgotten her own desire to hear what she called the Nuku Balavu attack, and she returned to the topic quite suddenly on one of Edgar's visits. "Now that you say we are likely to go there, Marama, I want more than ever to hear what happened. What

can keep Rupert away all this time! Do you think he is preparing surprises for us?"

Marama looked earnestly into the girl's upturned face as she replied with more than her usual tenderness:

"Yes, Melili darling, that must be the secret of his prolonged absence; but I, too, begin to find it strange."

After a pause Edgar ventured to say: "May we have the story Miss Sinclair asks for before I say good night?"

"If you both insist I will try to describe an experience I met with after my husband had gone to Sydney. You remember I told you that his vigorous health failed all at once, and change of climate was the one chance of saving his life at that time. I was too thankful to see him take it to feel any anxiety about being left. We knew there were hostile natives inland among the hills, but they had not molested us on the plantation we were forming upon a beautiful slope near the coast. We had been warned that they were cannibals, at war with each other, once indeed my Edward had heard the sound of their *lali*.

"What is that?" Edgar inquired.

"It is a sort of wooden drum; part of a tree is hollowed in the centre like a deep canoe; the sides are left in. With two instruments like huge pestles men beat the sides, and produce a peculiar booming sound that can be heard for miles. They play whole

sentences of communication such as 'put up your fighting fences, the enemy is upon us.' My own ears were soon to be saluted by weird echoes of the *lali*.

It was some hour of the night. Our dog barked. I sprang up, seized the revolver that lay close at hand, prompted by mere instinct of danger, not by familiarity with the weapon, I had never fired it in my life. Creeping to the tiny window, pierced in our thickly thatched walls, I peered out cautiously behind a corner of the blind. Brilliant moonlight flooded the scene; it shone upon tall columns of palms, upon a rich tangle of undergrowth foliage: many of the shrubs were in flower: there were starry white blossoms expanded to the moonbeams, and touches of bright scarlet among glossy leaves. The great feathery palm-fans hung motionless.

To this moment I recall the contrast of that tranquil beauty with the horrible sinking of my heart.

When our dog paused in his uneasy bark I could distinguish the *lali* faint but unmistakable. A variety of notes were struck that sounded full of meaning, what, I could not tell. Then the air became still as death.

I felt rigid, my eyes searched every bush and open space; imagination was excited to such a pitch that each instant I expected to see lithe, dusky forms leap forth with exulting yells of triumph. Anticipation of evil is often worse than the evil itself. My brain kept

asking what the signal meant: the thought that it might be an appeal to our own plantation hands almost unnerved me. If *they* were tempted to rebel, our doom was sealed.

My boy was sleeping in an inner room, his guardian Timmie on a mat across the doorway. Rupert merely stirred, his deep sleep remained unbroken. Timmie, half-raised upon one elbow was gazing at me.

"Did you hear?" I whispered. A movement of his head assented.

"What says the *lali*?"

"It says, look about, club the enemy."

"How far off is the *lali*?"

Timmie stood up and threw out an arm with a sweeping, upward gesture.

I felt instant relief, it seemed so distant. The native youth listened intently; he and I stood like statues of attention: I motioned him to come and look with me from the window; we could see over three terraces. Our house was stationed on the upper one, where also were grouped cook-house, yam-house, guest-house—just a room for bachelors—and wash-house. On the terrace below were cotton sheds, drying shed with *vattas* for spreading cotton in the sun, and a house for stranger natives when wanted for the cotton-picking. This was close to the creek, a bright little stream with boat-house, and landing stage.

Beyond under the next terrace were the houses for our native "hands"; each set of men had their own, these were out of sight. What a mistake! I thought, we should have kept our eyes upon them.

"Do our men stir?" I asked of Timmie.

"\**Moce moce*," was his answer. Putting up one of his hands, he laid his cheek upon it to simulate the repose of sleep.

I could trust Timmie's acute hearing, and breathed more freely. He looked alert and startled, but not afraid; I took comfort remembering that my Edward had heard the war *lali* months ago, and no harm had come to us. He had said the inland tribes were too much occupied in settling their own disputes to trouble us; they probably were not aware of our existence.

The Sinclair's home was nearer to them, about seven miles from ours as the crow flies; but across the mountains was no accessible way, and it was nearly a day's journey by sea to double the perilous reefs that stretched out from a deeply indented coast; this was a barrier to our intercourse. My mind at that moment flew straight away to Nina Sinclair; could evil threaten her? She is not alone, I thought, her husband is by her side powerful and determined. I began to form a plan of going to visit her, and

\*Pronounced mothe. C used to represent sound of th.

while thinking over this my own fears subsided. Timmie and I kept watch for some time longer, then went back to rest, I could not sleep.

In the morning our men went out as usual to their work among the cotton plants, they came in to breakfast, and for an hour's siesta.

Having finished my breakfast quickly, I stepped out upon the verandah . . . . What I saw was a party of young warlike natives coming up with yams. I knew from the way they were painted that mischief of some kind was meant; they wore only the *liku*, a short fringe of leaves, and they were blackened with charcoal. Hesitation would be fatal; I went forward, and asked what they wanted.

"We have come to buy knives for building," was the prompt reply.

This demand was not unusual; all native labour is done with this much-coveted implement: with it they turn up the soil, build houses, chop wood, &c. There was a brisk trade with Sydney for these knives, strong hafted, with huge blades.

A decision had instantly to be made.

I resolved to treat the men openly, and to make the deal.

I went down to the small iron building which contained our goods for trade. I bought their yams, and paid them well in knives; re-locked and barred

the door as swiftly as I could, lest a sudden spirit of cupidity should cause them to seize the entire stock. They talked among themselves, I began to feel frightened at the tone, but prayed I might not show fear.

"Bring the yams up to the yam-house," I said firmly, pointing in that direction.

Timmie was watching from the verandah, the colour of his face faded to a sickly green. I walked quickly to reach my door. The strangers overtook me about half-way; they all surrounded me and began.

"This is not a good knife," "You've cheated us," "You are all cheats you white people," "Open that store again," "Give up more."

"No," I said boldly, "come again when the *Turanga* is at home."

It was fortunate I did not pretend my husband was at home because they knew he was not.

They then clashed the knives together over my head—I shall never forget the ring of that steel—! They cut long rents in the skirt of my dress, soon it hung in broad strips: this I think was done to torture me, and to see if I would scream.

I heard my own voice say to them with great calm "You can do this; you can kill me now that you have got me here; but I am a *Marama ndine sava*

(Lady of high rank), my people will punish you, and shell your town. A woman can only die once, like a man."

Timmie could understand English, I called to him to unchain the dog. Bang was savage, he hated the natives. Timmie shut my boy into the inner room, and crawled flat to the ground, away beyond the garden fence. The dog came with leaps and bounds, flew at one man's throat, the others let me go, and cleared off about ten yards backward. Bang made rushes at them barking and biting furiously; they lost their heads for a few moments at the suddenness of his attack. I fled to the verandah, got into the house, bolted my doors, Timmie helping vigorously. "Don't be frightened," I said to him, "all will be right; go round to our men, tell them to creep up to my window at the back; to bring bows, arrows, clubs."

Timmie went, his short absence seemed an age; the hostiles were still fighting against Bang. Meanwhile under cover of the fence Timmie led back my own men armed; natives can draw themselves through the grass swiftly as snakes. They got in by the back window just as our assailants had rallied and begun to tear up the post and rail fence. A Fijian hit the dog over the head with a rail; poor Bang fell in a limp heap.

The hostiles came on howling their war-cry and



whirling the posts, as if they were spears ; they knew by this time there was no white man on the place.

My ten Solomon islanders, and ten men from Tanna were ranged behind me in the sitting-room ; I made them a speech ; "look here men," I said, "you are not to get frightened and run away to the bush ; the enemy will only follow and club you. Stop by me in the house ; together, with the revolver, we can keep them off ; they dare not stay too long, they know the *Turanga* must return, and help will come with him."

My men said they would stop and do as I told them, I would remain with them to the front.

The hostiles had arrived, preparing to assault the house. Our front door was made like that of a stable, opening in halves, I opened the upper half. The men behind me began a low-voiced chant, leaping in rhythmic leaps to excite themselves for the fray.

I fired two barrels of my revolver over the heads of the enemy ; they fell back a short distance at the sound, and at the sight of my armed men.

"Go away in peace," I said, "you have sold your yams and have got good value for them ; leave this place untouched."

Our cotton shed was packed with cotton ready for shipment, the fruit of a year's labour. With shouts they declared they would fire the shed, and went off to do it.

We issued from the house in an even *queue* fifteen of us ; I led, speaking as if to children ; my fear was lest I should lose control over them. They had been trained to have confidence in me.

‘Men,’ I said to them, ‘we must drive off these enemies, but not kill them . . . not shed their blood. Remember I have never yet told you wrong, obey now, or all your year’s wages will be forfeited.’

We were greeted with yells from the enemy. Happily there were no stones in our district or those would have been used against us with frightful force and precision.

One man had tied a bundle of dry reeds together and after lighting it, moved down to the cotton shed. Seeing what he was about, we took a short cut to intercept him and get between the raiders and our property.

I levelled the revolver again and called out, ‘if you come on I shall fire.’

They shouldered their clubs and advanced. When dangerously near I ordered my men to shoot, and set the example by firing another shot ; it struck a man grazing his ribs ; he reeled back : the flight of arrows took effect on the legs of several : the hostiles backed, and ran for shelter to a fence of brushwood.

My heart bounded with a sense of victory ! Not for long. After a pause, on they came ! this time it was,

I thought, a feint to scare us, and if we backed or ran, all would be lost. I kept a bold front, and the command I had over my men staggered the hostiles. They could hear me quietly talking, and they saw how the men obeyed : the scent of battle had impregnated me, I now really felt no fear, only an intense determination to conquer.

The creek was between us, an enemy soon advanced alone saying he wished to speak ; would I come forward to the bridge. This I did, most foolishly. He began to harangue with a very lofty air, and in the midst, raised the post he carried to aim a blow at me. My Tanna men sprang forward, pulled me aside, their blood was up, they hurled themselves at our opponents. A fierce struggle took place ; it resulted, after a wild *mélée* in my men forcing the enemy to give way. The difficulty was to restrain them from killing : if there had been slaughter, the deed could have never been wiped out, we should have been marked for sure revenge. Besides the example would doubtless have been followed by other settlers with less excuse. We always taught the natives our aim was to live in peace with them, not to do them wrong of any kind.

Looked at from their point of view, we appeared to those wild fellows as interlopers upon their soil ; they merely acted in accordance with their sense of justice."

"On the other hand," said Edgar Devon "if such raids were suffered to go unpunished, all the plantations would be devastated."

"True. The old settlers said that if I had not been able to act as I did, and hold my own, we should have been killed. The natives came with the express purpose of making an end of us; the plot leaked out afterwards."

"Marama you are a heroine!" exclaimed Mary. "Did the hostiles retreat into the hills?"

"They went off uttering threats to return at night; we expected them; a long and anxious watch we kept. I could only have a detachment of my natives in the house; the larger number was posted outside: I had to visit them at intervals to encourage them and keep up their good spirits. The fidelity they showed was wonderful, they might so easily have deserted me, sought safety in the bush, or joined the hostile party."

"Your own courage was marvellous," said Edgar.

"It was given in answer to prayer," was Marama's quiet reply, "without that help I am a coward."

Later in the evening she walked down to the wicker gate with her departing guest, having first given Mary a sign not to follow. Standing there she said to Edgar in tones of emotion, "I ask you never again to refer to the incident I have related . . . Mary's parents both perished shortly afterwards . . . they were slain on

their own plantation. Hostiles were in hiding among the cotton plants; Mr. Sinclair went with a whip to order them off thinking they were his own servants . . . . . he was struck down and tomahawked on the spot. His wife saw him fall; she fired two shots from her window, wounding two men, then ran along the verandah, to try, it was supposed, to reach and rouse the servants. We know now that they were in a certain collusion with the hostiles; they did not appear, nor afford her any protection . . . . . She was found clasping one of the posts of the verandah, her beautiful head bowed against it . . . . . her long, luxuriant hair struck into the timber by the blows rained upon her. Death must have been instantaneous, and merciful . . . . .”

Tears filled Marama's eyes, her voice failed. The listener bared his head. “Has she been avenged?” he asked in tones shaken by indignation.

“When my husband returned from Sydney, part of the truth leaked out; natives are great gossips among themselves. John Sinclair was, unfortunately, very imperious in his treatment of native servants. It seems that one of them who had been struck with the whip conveyed secret intelligence to a hostile chief. My Edward vowed to bring that chief to justice.”

“You mean that he took vengeance at once, a life for a life?” inquired Edgar vehemently.

"No. The most expert native trackers, whom Edward had to aid him in his search, were baffled and failed to track down the offender. But my husband always believed that, one day, he would be found and punished. For my own part," Marama added wistfully, "I feel sure that extreme severity, and lawless reprisals of bloodshed, neither soften, educate nor subdue this race. In past years, and even now, these islanders have suffered terrible wrongs at the hands of the whites. Barbarous cases of kidnapping have taken place, and worse evils than I can repeat. We, honest settlers, suffer for the base deeds of unscrupulous whites who, beyond the reach of law, have tricked the natives, abused their generosity, and taken every mean advantage of their natural trustfulness. Great iniquities have been committed in the labour traffic."

"England should assume the reins of government," said Devon, "law of some sort must be introduced, and the chiefs will have to submit."

"There are fine characters among them," Marama answered, "their own code is admirable in many ways, and is strictly obeyed by native subjects. The white schemers are they who trample order under foot."

"Oh, well, they can't obey the coloured fellows," he said quickly.

"They might at least respect the native laws, and be less grasping themselves," rejoined Marama.

"Suppose we make a king of *Vuni Valu*, what do you say to that idea?" he asked ironically.

Marama could not help smiling. "I have immense regard for *Vuni Valu* as chief of Fiji, but I am not quite prepared to acknowledge him as my sovereign."

"There! after extolling his merits as a law-giver, you are the first to rebel; it is the privilege of ladies to be inconsistent. Good night," Edgar added seriously, "I am deeply touched by what you have told me, and will never refer to the pathetic history in Miss Sinclair's presence, or indeed at all, if you forbid it."

"I do," replied Marama earnestly "Mary's recollection of the horror is mercifully indistinct. She was found asleep in her little bed, where she had been laid by her poor mother, for the mid-day siesta. My native messengers brought her away; I had sent them, with a letter, to warn the Sinclairs of danger. My men arrived upon the scene almost directly after the tragedy happened; they fled back to their canoe, bringing the child, whom they delivered in safety to me."

Edgar pressed one hand over his eyes, as if to shut out a lurid picture.

"What is the state of things there now?" he asked presently.

"Quite changed. Père Joseph has got a footing along the coast; two priests are in charge of the Mission he has established: the tribes have settled

their dispute, and appear no longer antagonistic to the white settlers. My son Rupert may return to us any day now, we shall sail with him on his next cruise."

"I should have thought after such an experience, you would never want to see the place again," Edgar remarked in undisguised astonishment.

"My constant regret is that I was ever persuaded to leave: my Edward arranged for me to come into Levuka with the children; he was to join us later . . . I am still expecting him . . ." Marama's last sentence was breathed rather than spoken.

She gave her hand to Edgar Devon in silence, and turning away went slowly back to the house.



## CHAPTER V.

### MARY MAKES CONVERSATION.

It so happened that on one of Edgar's subsequent visits, his hostess was called from the room by Surawaia, upon a matter requiring her mistress' immediate presence. Unwonted shyness took possession of Mary when she found herself left alone to entertain the visitor.

After a pause of some moments he asked, "Why are you so silent?"

"I am waiting for you to begin, as usual," she answered with very pretty confusion.

"You despise the art of *making* conversation?" was his smiling inquiry.

"Yes, if that means saying things that nobody wants to hear."

He laughed a little, "Well, it does amount to that sometimes."

"I have had no practice; Marama would not like me to 'make conversation' for her, I am sure. Some days we say very little, it does not matter because we

understand each other; do *friends* make conversation?" she asked incredulously.

"Between friends talk is generally spontaneous."

"Ah, that is the way with Marama and Rupert and me, we are spontaneous or we are quiet. When he is at home we are very spontaneous, we talk all the time without knowing it, I think."

"Why not talk to me like that?"

"The case is quite different, whatever I say suits Rupert, he is not critical. Now nothing will satisfy me but to go into society in some part of the world or another, to learn all these arts of which I hear you speak."

"You have been in a very good school already," he said.

"In the highest *meke* circles of Fiji!" came the quick response with her silvery laugh.

"You might search the civilized world and not find a better model than Marama," he declared with emphasis.

"I adore Marama, but do you consider her up-to-date?" Mary's eyes were sparkling with amusement, she had caught many of his expressions, and enjoyed airing them for his benefit.

"The refinement which graces Mrs. Camden is a mark of distinction at all times, and can never be out of date."

"Although she brought me up it does not follow that I am like her; and, in fact, I want to be rather different just to make a little variety in our lives; it is so dull always to think alike; there are more ways than one of seeing things and it is amusing to find them out."

"Where do you propose to finish your education; is your heart set upon any particular part of the civilized world?"

"I should like to see the whole of it," she said, with enthusiasm; "English speech and manners are I suppose the best that can be copied?"

Her glance of inquiry was also one of unconscious approval, which did not escape his vigilance, and gratified him extremely.

"It is a matter of taste," was his answer. "Père Joseph, if his humility allowed him to give an opinion, would probably refer you to his native land of France for intellectual excellence, for refinement and polish."

"But you called him 'a rustic' the other day!"

"So he is in the sense that he is content to live and die in this country, devoted to savages; and his régime is quite painfully frugal; he ignores even elementary comfort."

"That is the rule of his Order," Mary explained, "we think him rather a good judge of manners. Marama says that Rupert owes much to Père Joseph's example

and hints, without them he might have grown up very rough."

Edgar was secretly bored by the frequent mention of Marama's absent son, whom he had not seen but mentally classed as a 'raw colonial cub.' With a careless shrug of his own fine shoulders he said, "As the boy is going to spend his life here, it is of no importance."

"It is important to be presentable wherever one lives," returned Mary, rather nettled at his tone; "my education leaves much to be desired, as Père Joseph says when things disappoint him. It is like Fijian industry; natives hate hard work, so do I. *Thack-a-thack* they call it; when an employer's back is turned they drop their knives to laugh and chat, and *laze* in the shade."

"I should very soon devise a plan to quicken their energy." The sudden flash that lit Edgar Devon's eyes as he spoke startled Mary.

"To get angry with Fijians is of no use," she said; "they think a man in a rage quite funny to look at. You see they admire dignity; besides," she went on, "God did not intend the natives to slave all day in this climate. He gave plenty of food to be got without much labour; they work very well in their own way: what they do is well done; it is skilful, even artistic. We could not do it, you and I," Mary finished with considerable warmth.

"I don't like to hear you waste such eloquence over these big, lazy, brown giants, it makes me feel quite envious."

"Then you must not threaten my countrymen. I cannot like anybody who wants to interfere with their simple, happy lives."

"Your countrymen! *Pray* never give Fijians such an unmerited title!"

"But their country is mine, I was born here and know no other land!"

"It is high time you did; impossible that your young life should be spent in this wilderness!"

Mary looked ready to defend it to the death.

"Oh, beautiful enough as far as nature goes, but you were not created to pass your days in this seclusion; the society is quite beneath you, and there can be no companionship in native servants."

"Of a sort," she insisted. "I understand them, I know what they feel about their land, their customs, their liberty. They have their own kind of cleverness, their own laws, and good ones, too. The *whites* here generally treat natives worse than animals; animals are rather prized, we have so few, but natives are only thought good enough to labour in the sun while the whites sit and smoke under the palms. Of course the poor things hate it they love freedom; to be able to go and come, sail and fish as they please, and as they

used before the others came. I often wonder that they don't rise up and kill us all!"

Edgar looked at her with intense interest, an involuntary shiver passed through him, as he thought of her parents' tragic fate. "This country is no fit place for you," broke from his lips.

"It does not really satisfy me," she said wistfully, "England calls to me night and day, and other countries, too; I should like to see them all."

"It only rests with yourself to have that wish gratified," he said gently.

Mary's lovely eyes of 'speed-well' blue opened to their widest extent. "Why, there is not a chance! The difficulties are too many and great to be reckoned, much less overcome. Long before we shall be able to leave Fiji I shall have grown old, lame, deaf and blind; what is the use of going, then?"

"Absolutely none," he responded, a vivid smile lighting up his serious face, at the impossible picture her words evoked. How could any such change come to the radiant being sitting opposite?

"I know that your foster-mother clings to this country, and is resolved to remain in it, but you are not bound to spend your life by her side." His tones were singularly gentle; Mary glanced across in surprise, only for an instant, the long dark fringes descended quickly shading her eyes.

After a pause he said suddenly, "May I speak to Marama? I want to ask her to let me take care of you altogether—— as my wife."

A beautiful rose tint had crept into Mary's cheeks, contrasting with the creamy whiteness of her brow, her voice trembled slightly as she said hurriedly, "Say nothing like that to Marama while Rupert is away, it might hurt and trouble her."

"But does it trouble you?" he asked anxiously. "I want you to give me the right of doing everything I can to make you happy in your own way. I meant to speak to Mrs. Camden first before telling you of my hope, but you see fate has been too strong for me, it took her away and left you. I am bound in honour now to speak at once to her. Say *one* word to me," he urged.

At this moment Marama came into the room, doors were rarely shut in the Camden bungalow. Mary's eyes were again raised, for a second, in his direction; "Try," was her one whispered word; then hastily murmuring an excuse she disappeared, her heart beating like that of a frightened bird, yet fear was in no way responsible for its action.

Edgar's intently listening ear had caught the word he sought, it braced him for a difficult interview. He did not allow time to cool his courage, or give his hostess an opportunity of introducing other topics, he

plunged directly into the subject that filled his heart and mind. Mrs. Camden listened without great astonishment to an explanation of himself and his circumstances. With her own exquisite courtesy, and the usual colonial hospitality, she had accepted his society without question. She now heard for the first time of his inherited English home in one of the most picturesque counties of the old land. She learned that he was travelling for recreation, he had seen so much of Europe that curiosity prompted him to visit less civilized portions of the globe. He had been first to New Zealand to see the land which belonged to him there ; bought in his father's life-time, but not yet viewed by any member of the family. Thence he had come to Fiji attracted by a vague notion of the beauties of semi-tropical scenery. He had expected to verify his idea, and see enough of it in a coasting trip. One day when bathing in Levuka harbour, he had tried to explore a reef ; his feet had been cut severely by the coral : its poisonous qualities, of which he was ignorant, soon took alarming effect.

In the little hotel people said that nobody understood the treatment of such wounds so well as Mrs. Camden of the Bungalow.

Without consulting him they had sent up to tell that lady of the stranger's plight.

"You know the sequel," he continued, looking up



at her gratefully. "Like the good Samaritan you actually came; you ministered and prescribed with such skill and capability that I was soon able to climb the steep path leading to your home, and express my thanks in person. You know exactly how I have spent my time, everything has been freely discussed with you and Père Joseph. Visits to the bungalow have been my sole delight. It seems a base return on my part for the kindness and generosity shown to me, to seek to rob you of your treasure . . . but if Miss Sinclair, *Mary*, is willing to commit her happiness to my care . . . and to share my name and my life . . . I beg you not to refuse your consent."

Marama had grown visibly paler during his speech, a pained expression had come into her soft brilliant eyes; her tones were low, but very firm as she said, "I am going to ask you to give me your word of honour that you will say nothing of all this to Mary; and that for a time at least you will discontinue the visits, which we also have enjoyed. My son is her guardian jointly with myself, and so grave a question regarding her future cannot be arranged in his absence. To tell you the truth I do not wish to see her married; a year hence will be time enough for her to think of changing her state. As yet she has never entertained the thought, she has the mind of a child still."

"My hopes are no secret to her now," he said gravely. "If you insist upon what seems to me an arbitrary measure, I must of course obey you . . . and wait with such patience as I can . . . on this proviso . . . that Miss Sinclair be told of the condition laid upon me, and that she be assured of my *unalterable* fidelity."

He spoke with emphatic sternness, and his features only slightly relaxed as Mrs. Camden bowed her head in silent acquiescence. He saw that her emotion prevented speech. A chivalrous impulse, which he did not check or explain, caused him to raise her hand respectfully to his lips before leaving the room.

When Marama was alone, she sat thinking deeply for some time, the habitual calm of her beautiful face disturbed as though she were in some way stricken. Her secluded life, with the under-current of hidden peril to be confronted at any moment had taught her self-control; it inclined her also to cling very fondly to objects on which her heart was set. The narrower the circle of those interests, so much the more concentrated was her affection. Edgar Devon's proposal had shattered a cherished dream, for Marama was saying unconsciously half-aloud: "He has had the world to choose from, he must have seen good and beautiful women in many lands—yet he has found his way *here*, to this remote spot, in the midst of the great

Pacific, and would steal away our child, our one heart's joy . . . . . It has been my secret hope, never breathed to mortal ears . . . . . that I might see her Rupert's wife before I die.

“How this news will affect him I cannot tell, but no decision shall be made until he hears it. If he is happy and satisfied to let Mary go out of our life without wishing to detain her; then I shall be silent to the end.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PRISONER INTERVIEWED.

Not many weeks after this conversation Vuni Valu, his suite, and his English secretary were to be seen walking down to the beach from the cluster of houses which formed the King's residence. His majesty's tall, stalwart figure was swathed in yards of elaborately ornamented *tapa* cloth, his head was adorned with a turban of the same material, prepared from the bark of the paper mulberry, pure white. He carried a large fan, and one of his attendants held a huge pandanus leaf over him, more as a tribute to his rank, than as a protection from the sun which had barely risen.

The sight caused some excitement in Mrs. Camden's small household, already astir.

Her house was stationed at a considerable distance from other dwellings, it occupied a commanding position upon a natural terrace overlooking the bay. All rooms were on the ground floor, opening on to a verandah, the roof was low. Since her arrival in Levuka Mrs. Camden had lived there with Mary for

her constant companion. Rupert, her only son managed their large cotton plantation at Nuku Balavu : he was an expert sailor, and came and went in his "cutter."

To people who did not understand the faith that governed Mrs Camden's thoughts and actions, she appeared as a fatalist. White settlers wondered how she could choose to live on in a place that had clouded her days by calamity.

Just when success was about to crown their patient labour and severe privations, her husband and all with him had perished in a hurricane. Not a vestige remained of men or boat, nothing had ever been found or seen. Yet she was able to watch her son embark time after time with prayerful calm ; she seemed to cling to the place as if it were a sacred legacy. She wished to go and live upon the distant property herself ; to this Rupert would not consent ; the cannibal tribes beyond the mountains were not altogether at peace : and until the war *lali* ceased to echo, no matter how far off and faintly, Rupert decided that Nuku Balavu was no place for his mother and Mary.

Mrs. Camden had yielded to her son's wishes, she agreed to wait, and occupied herself in educating Mary. It was after a desultory fashion, there being many interruptions, but the result was far more solid than might be supposed.

Mary was the admiration of the few white families admitted to acquaintance ; the coloured community looked upon her with reverence as if she were a being from a loftier sphere. She was now gazing from the verandah, both hands raised to shelter her eyes, full of conjecture as to what the distant procession might mean.

“It is Vuni Valu himself, what can he want with us?”

“Come in child, and do not show yourself during the visit, how awkward that Rupert is away.”

Marama's tones betrayed anxiety. Affairs in this young settlement were rapidly approaching a crisis. There had been prolonged enmity between two great chiefs who each claimed supreme rule. A party of white settlers had formed themselves into a government and had crowned Vuni Valu as the ostensible head. There was an equally strong party opposed to this step, they tried to frustrate every measure proposed. The object of both parties was to get possession of the native lands as soon as possible.

“Vuni Valu is not coming here, Marama, they are turning off towards the beach. Oh ! there is a ship outside the reef . . . . he must be going on board.”

Marama stepped through one of the French windows, with a field-glass in her hand, through which she first examined the sea line.

"Yes, it is a large steamer, I can't make out her flag ; stars and stripes I fancy. What is that astern? She has . . . a cutter . . . in tow."

There was a marked vibration in Marama's voice as she noted that; she kept the glass levelled on the small vessel.

Mary continued to watch the royal party.

"They are manning the canoes, Vuni Valu has stepped in, and I believe Mr. Devon is with him. They are shaking out the sails." Mary's eyes were on the great three-cornered mats as they swung round and filled to the light breeze. "They will have a beautiful run if the wind holds . . . now they are off!"

Marama had left the window open behind her. One could see into her pretty room. The French windows were fitted with outside wooden shutters or *persiennes* to ward off heat; hers was the only house that could yet boast of that luxury. White muslin curtains draped the windows inside. There was a piano, a sofa and chairs, a few vases stood on brackets, one held a cluster of white flowers, another a branch of bright crimson leaves. Some photographs hung in embroidered satin or velvet frames—Marama's own handiwork. A painting of Rupert's father was in the place of honor, it hung by a slender cord of native sinnet, the frame was worked with convolvulus leaves and shamrock on satin. The floor was covered with

Fijian mats of fine texture, woven in artistic patterns.

"Take the glass," Marama said presently. "Can you make out if there is anyone on board the cutter?"

Mary glanced inquiringly into her face, before lifting the glass, and changing the sight to suit her younger eyes.

"One, two, natives in the bows; but I can't be sure at this distance. Why, Marama? Do you think it may be——"

"The 'Sea-bird,' and if it is Rupert's cutter, where is he?" asked his mother again taking the glass, real anxiety betrayed in voice and manner.

"On board the steamer. But we must wait till they come into harbour, it is all guesswork, we know nothing about them yet," Mary said, with the cheerful decision she often used to dispel Marama's forebodings.

Both were conscious of a singular and sudden interest in the distant vessels, with a vague uneasiness that neither tried to explain.

They continued to watch the progress of the King's canoes, gradually lessened to small specks when alongside the ship. They could not follow what took place upon the main deck.

Vuni Valu showed an implicit and noble confidence in his so-called white subjects; he left his coloured retinue in the canoes; motioned to Edgar Devon to precede him, Fijian etiquette not permitting an



inferior to pass behind his superior. The king followed, going up the ship's side with wonderful ease and agility for his seventy years. When his stately figure stood upright on the deck, a group assembled round him in considerable astonishment: impressed by his natural dignity and self-possession, they waited for him to speak.

The king swept his turbaned head upward as he uttered the salutation.

*"Sai yadra."*

Several voices responded. There was a pause, during which Vuni Valu's eagle eyes seemed to take in every item of his surroundings in one deliberate glance. Then with a slow majestic wave of his right hand, he gave his white companion to understand that he might now open proceedings.

The king's secretary was not wanting in assurance, but he certainly seemed embarrassed, he merely cleared his throat, and was dumb.

Astonished at the hesitation, Vuni Valu signified disapproval of it by an imperious look at the secretary, who then said:

"I did my utmost to keep him away, and spare you the trouble of this visit, but he has very high notions of his own importance and cannot be persuaded to give up what he considers his duty and his prerogatives."

"What is in the wind now?" asked the American Captain in answer to Edgar Devon's English speech.

"We have been obliged, for various reasons, to recognize Vuni Valu's authority over the white population for a time."

"Well, that does not explain his coming aboard my ship; coloured folks have no authority here."

"Vuni Valu has heard that you have a chieftain prisoner on board. Vuni Valu as king, claims his right to see the man, to hear the case against him, to judge him, and if necessary, to pass sentence."

Hearing his own name seemed to satisfy the King; he bent his fine old head slightly forward as if to listen, although he could not understand a word of the English dialogue. There was in his attitude a strange mixture of pride and deference. His clear, penetrating gaze was fixed upon his secretary and spokesman.

"The prisoner is mine; he surrendered to me; I am taking him to Levuka to speak with the black robe of the Lotu Katolika. No man shall lay a finger on him."

This speaker had sprung forward from the group of white men, and stood facing Vuni Valu, as he said these words in the Fijian language.

He was above middle height and finely made: energy was in every movement of his lissom frame, strong of muscle and sinew; his features appeared so

familiar to Edgar Devon that he tried to recall where he could have met this handsome young man before. His brown eyes had in them the calm, steady look that told of perpetual contact with danger which he was accustomed to measure coolly, without fear.

Vuni Valu betrayed no surprise, he probably knew who it was, he straightened himself to his full height, as he replied :

“ The *Lotu Katolika* is different to the *Lotu* of ‘ those others ’ to whom I have listened. ‘ Those others ’ say that the big Christian law Book is for all, and the same for all men ; how then are there so many divisions among them, and why do no white men obey the holy law Book ? My people tell me that the black-robed Katolika does. Some, who know him, say that his life is formed on the very pattern given in the Book ; but ‘ those others ’ to whom I have listened, swear that his *Lotu* (religion) is false . . . Where am I to find the truth ? ”

Vuni Valu’s tones were deep and melodious ; there was a pathetic ring in his voice as he pronounced the last words ; his gaze sought the horizon, and seemed to interrogate sky and sea as he asked the momentous question.

Every listener was mute except the young man who claimed the prisoner.

“ I invite you, O King, to come with us to the black-

robe. There you shall be satisfied, there you shall hear and judge my prisoner's cause."

"Too late. I cannot go with you to him, for I have given my word to 'those others' not to hear speech from the black-robos. Bring forth the prisoner that my eyes may see him now."

"Vuni Valu, I too, have pledged my word. The prisoner is mine, he trusts me, and I will not fail him."

"'Pears to me," interrupted the American captain, "that there's quite too much fuss over this nigger, and I don't see why you, young sir, have elected to shield him, when we all know his crime, and that he ought to swing for it. If I had my way he would be hanging at the yard-arm now."

"What is his crime?" asked Edgar Devon, glad to relieve his embarrassment by turning to the captain.

"Murder," was the response he snapped out.

"Where?"

"On Viti Levu, the big island."

"When? I mean how long ago did this happen?"

"I can't exactly say, some few years. That young man knows all about it, and to do him justice he deserves a lot of credit for the capture."

"Tell me the circumstances," Edgar Devon urged in low tones. It will be useful, because I have influence over the king, and am bound to insist that he

carries out our ideas of justice." The captain shouted an order to the crew before he replied. "A planter and his young wife, were savagely killed upon their own plantation, and this chief we've got aboard was the instigator, if he did not actually do the deed with his own hands."

"Great Heaven! what was the planter's name?"

"My memory is bad for names, but anyway they were from America, and that chieftain oughtn't to live."

"He shall not. Justice must be done, uphold me now and we will have sentence pronounced. Act quickly; send a squad of men to bring up the prisoner, while that young fellow is occupied. He has got Vuni Valu's ear, and seems to be persuading him."

A few minutes later a knot of sailors appeared upon the main deck. In their midst walked a man, whose head towered above the others: he was a splendid type of his race; his colour, a clear and delicate shade of brown. High rank was proclaimed by the intricate patterns traced and stained upon the *sulu* elegantly draped about him. He looked like one in a tortured dream; his mind so far removed from what was going on round him, as to make him appear almost unconscious, and totally indifferent to external things.

Profound gravity deepened upon Vuni Valu's face when he turned and looked upon the chieftain.

Strong emotion of some kind caused even his colour to change when he beheld his countryman's manacled wrists. Words burst forth.

"What degradation is this! I have come out to meet you, and to warn. Why? Because I knew from your own people what was done. Word was brought to me that you were taken by whites, that they were bringing you captive into Levuka on the big ship . . . your hands bound with iron. Do you not know that white men in the Koro (town) will clamour for your death? Their law, which I have sworn to observe, *hangs by the neck*! If you were a *kaisi* (common man) this might be done. But you are a chieftain of my own rank! why then have you slain a white man and his wife who had done you no wrong?"

The prisoner's eyes blazed with sudden fire, he threw back his head.

"Wrong?" he echoed. "Is it no wrong that this hated race forces us to forsake the traditions and customs of our fathers? We have no enemies like these white foreigners who snatch from us our lands . . . They cheat us . . . they deceive us . . . they break their oaths to us . . . they seize all, and give nothing but disease and death. Hundreds of our race have they borne away to die in bitter slavery. Our men and women, so happy in their own land, where their needs were all supplied without cruel and constant labour.

These oppressors will grind us who remain under their hated feet! A wail of despair has gone up from every heart. Our women say Fiji is ours no more; why should we bring children into the world to slave for these bad white foreigners? Let us rather die!"

"Listen O Matafu, there is a change. The white *papalangi* (foreigners) have sworn allegiance to me . . . they have made me their king . . . they have vowed to respect our rights. Peace is to reign between the white and coloured races. Good is to prevail. Evil must be punished."

"Begin then with our betrayers!" taunted Matafu bitterly, "slay them who brought evil amongst us! Do you heed their false tongues? They are liars."

"Some have been false, but not all," said the king; "therefore," he continued looking round upon his auditors, "I cannot hide Matafu from your law. It has found him; he is here to pay his debt . . ."

"Stop, Vuni Valu," interrupted the young Englishman, "things are not done this way. Matafu must go into Levuka, there he shall first see the black-robed Katolika. Afterwards there may be a court of inquiry, Matafu will be defended.' Twelve chosen men must agree about his guilt, before he can be punished. He may be recommended to mercy; then you can pardon him."

A gleam of joy broke like sunlight over the king's

dusky features. "The words that you speak to me" he said "are those of the great law Book which 'those others' have read out. It says 'Love your enemies! Forgive them their debts!'"

"Are you mad?" Edgar Devon asked angrily of the young advocate, "Do you want a free pardon for a wretched native, who, as I learn from the captain of this ship, has confessed to a savage murder, a double murder, of innocent white settlers? We, who have some feeling for our fellow-countrymen, shall take care that this felon pays the full penalty of his atrocious crime. Vuni Valu must make an example of him—nothing could be more opportune—capital punishment in this case will have an excellent effect. It will show turbulent leaders their fate. Of course it is a farce our having Vuni as king, but being absolutely without protection from hostile tribes, we must keep up the comedy for a time with those that are friendly."

"I have no notion whom you may be," returned the young man with calm disdain, "but speak for yourself; act any comedy you please. My life has been passed among the natives of this country, I have no fear of them. Let me tell you that if violence is done to this chieftain, it will be bad for your safety; it will give the death-blow to your king's prestige; it will shake the whole nation's confidence and respect for him. Vuni Valu, you are Matafu's superior," he urged, speak-



ing again in Fijian, "order him out of this to be taken back to my cabin, come down yourself and talk to him there."

There was a threatening movement in the group about them. The native king's penetrating eyes questioned each face in turn, while a series of short, sharp sentences were snapped out in what was to him, an unknown tongue. Quickly enough he saw that every mouth breathed vengeance upon the hapless chieftain.

With a grand gesture he imposed silence. He remained for some moments speechless himself, his gaze lowered upon the deck; then lifting up his voice he eloquently declared that death was the forfeit Matafu must pay. "Leave him here on deck, we are not far from land, where the sun will warm his straight limbs no more. Take him not again below, let him see the waves a little longer, there can be no harm in that, guarded as he is, and your irons bound upon his hands. They have degraded him so that he heeds not death, he would rather die than live. If he went back to his people they would turn upon him with their clubs, they would trample him under their feet, because it is unheard of in our land, that a chieftain should suffer such indignity, as to be held in bondage by the whites, Look . . . his heart is broken . . . let him alone."

After his one fervid outbreak Matafu had relapsed

into his former state of apathy. Like a man half-stunned he seemed to follow the drift of Vuni Valu's speech; under the dark skin he looked almost pale with humiliation and misery.

The native king's tones, and more especially, his gestures, had in them a sort of fascination that compelled obedience. The sailors stood aside carelessly as if ashamed to take advantage of a beaten man.

Attention was suddenly diverted by the position of the ship.

During the temporary excitement, she had run dangerously near an arm of sunken coral reef over which curled a line of white-foamed breakers.

In an instant the captain was in his place on the bridge, his hoarse voice calling out angry commands. The crew's bare feet were swiftly scudding here and there in response to his directions. The steersman looked anxious, and guilty, for he too had given way to curiosity over the native king's visit.

The situation was critical, and for a time personal safety was a question that occupied most minds on board.

The two natives alone took no heed of the stir. Vuni Valu stepped forward till his face was level with that of the prisoner.

Looking him squarely in the eyes he said in slow, emphatic accents :

"Matafu, you are *not* to go into Levuka . . . with . . . your life."

His brother chieftain spoke no word, none was necessary to prove that he understood; he simply threw back his head, with a gesture of proud assent. Then, fleet as a deer, he sprang across the deck, upon the bulwarks, and holding his manacled hands aloft, he dropped forward of the paddle wheel that was threshing the waves with full power. Caught under its huge floats, dead as the teeth of some aquatic monster, his body whirled and disappeared. Not until the temporary panic had subsided was the chieftain missed . . . .

A boat was quickly lowered, but in vain did young Rupert Camden row round and round, and search the spot. His prisoner had escaped from human vengeance, and the sea would reveal no trace of his remains.

Calm, impassive, Vuni Valu displayed no interest in the quest, nor in the baffled discussion that ensued on board. After giving a vigorous signal to his followers, he waited till his canoe was alongside, then descended into it. His white secretary had gone to confer with the ship's captain; the king did not summon him, for the object of the royal visit was accomplished. Fijian honour, at least, was saved.

## CHAPTER VII.

### RUPERT SHOWS A TALISMAN, AND EXPLAINS THE SITUATION.

MARAMA and her son sat up late into the night ; long after Mary—in less high spirits than usual—had retired to rest. Something about her puzzled Rupert after the first joyous greeting when she and his mother ran to meet him at the wicker gate. He fancied there was a sort of constraint in her manner towards him.

“ Perhaps,” he thought, “ the fault is in myself.”

He had not been able to shake off a cloud left upon his spirit by the rude interruption to his plans, caused by the scene with Vuni Valu, and his white Secretary, which culminated in Matafu’s leap to death.

Not one word of that scene did Rupert report until he and Marama were alone.

Then he took from an inside pocket of his linen coat a small object. It was wrapped in folds of tapa cloth, he slowly unwound the soiled strips, and taking up one of his mother’s hands, he held it in his own while he placed a ring upon her open palm.

"Did you ever see this before?" he asked.

He could feel the startled thrill that passed through her frame, as he spoke.

She grew pale, but answered calmly, "It is not your father's."

"No, no, dear, don't expect it, we shall never see again anything he was wearing; but I thought you might know this."

"I do," she said, lifting the ring with a kind of tender reverence; she held it delicately between the thumb and finger of her free hand, and looked closely at the device. "How strange, where did you find this?"

"Tell me whose it was, and where you saw it," he insisted eagerly.

Marama scarcely seemed to hear him, her eyes were dreamy with the far-away expression, as when old memories were awakened.

"This ring belonged to poor John Sinclair . . . Mary's father . . . "she almost whispered, "it was always on his finger. When last I saw it, the baby girl was on his knee, she had clutched his finger in both her little hands, and carried it baby-fashion to her mouth. See, their initials, his and Nina's are very deeply cut into the blood stone . . . it wants cleaning for you to see them well . . . Ah!" she shuddered, "where has it been?" She pointed to the strips of

tapa cloth which Rupert had dropped upon the floor, "I need not ask, you got it from the natives."

"Yes, from Matafu," he answered.

"Sinclair's murderer?" she exclaimed in horror.

"No, Matafu did not kill him."

"But he is the very chief your father vowed to bring to justice. Rupert, tell me, keep nothing back . . . Has that savage slain them both?"

"Mother dear, be calm. My father's grave is in the sea. Oh, *do* believe it. He did not die by man's violence, John Sinclair did: he was killed by tribesmen from the hills, they brought this ring to Matafu, as a proof, and as a trophy. Ever since, the chieftain has worn it fastened to his neck, not visibly, wrapped in tapa as you saw; he held it as a kind of charm."

"How did you get it from him?" Marama asked.

"It's rather a long story, but the end was, he gave the little package to my hands, himself."

Rupert was silent for a few seconds . . .

"I have not said much to you about it," he continued, "what was the use until the thing was done, but to get hold of Matafu seemed to me like a duty I owed my father. I meant to do it if any man could. You remember those lessons I took in Sydney from the great athlete Joe Benson? And how disgusted you were. You thought I was showing taste for a low kind of sport. It was not that, but I wanted

enough science to give me an advantage when the tussle came. Joe was proud of my skill in wrestling, and I have been more than grateful for his instruction lately.

It saved my life when I closed with Matafu. We were in the dark. To take him I had to creep through the hole into his hut by night. The danger was lest he should hear me before I could regain my feet. It was the nimblest leap I ever took. I was scarcely upright when he was on me like a lion ; but he had not time to fairly grip me in his powerful arms, before he found himself lying flat upon his back, never more astonished in his life than to know how he got there so quickly. It was a desperate strife to keep his hands from choking me ; he got up somehow, and again I succeeded in throwing him, he pitched upon his face. By this time two of my best fellows had scrambled in, and together we secured him hand and foot, despite his furious resistance. News of the capture spread like wild-fire, you would wonder how, in a place where plantations are so far apart and isolated ! His power was dreaded all along the coast. Well, an American steamer, on a coasting cruise, put in, and nothing would do, but that the prisoner should be taken on board and brought into Levuka. My voice was alone against the lot, I was one man against thirty, so had to give in and bring my captive."

"But that was the best arrangement possible," said Marama. "Why did you object?"

"Why? Because I wanted to save the poor fellow's life, and so would you, if you could have heard him speak. His was a simple and grand defence and I could not look him in the face when listening to it. *Merciless white kidnappers* are at the root of all the mischief and bad blood. Their infamous deeds are the curse of these islands. You can't blame the natives. How can they tell friend from foe when the worst rogues begin with a pretence of good-will? After the first brutal deception, natives class all together. In their eyes the white devil is a monster to be clubbed at sight, or taken unaware."

"Yes," sighed Marama, "until the labour traffic is put down, and the traffickers are made to suffer the full penalty of civilised law, we can never prove our good faith to these islanders."

"Nobody really *cares* to keep faith with them," muttered Rupert, "except the few Catholics. That makes things so hard for Père Joseph, and his like. Still it is wonderful how natives *do* trust the French *missionaries* after a short experience of them, and their teaching. You see life or death is all one to those apostles, they go prepared for martyrdom, just full of the love of God, burning with zeal to make it known to the heathen, whose soul they reckon as



precious as their own. Their example is their strong point. Courage, devotion, simplicity, purity, unselfishness ; the beauty of these can be seen in all they do and say. Their works are far more expressive than speech."

"By their fruits ye shall know them." Marama quoted gently, as she looked with tender pride at her son's earnest face, which was bent downwards thoughtfully.

After a pause he said "You will be surprised to hear that Matafu had met Père Joseph long ago "

"Is it possible ! I can scarcely credit that. The father would surely have told me."

"He probably never knew who the chieftain was whom he approached in quiet innocence."

Matufu's first impulse was to brain him on the spot, but he forebore out of sheer astonishment at his aspect ; unarmed, showing no sign of fear or doubt ; and you know his courteous little salutation ? it is the same for everybody ; his smile, and an expression on his homely face which makes it look angelic.

Matafu's attention was caught by the crucifix in his visitor's girdle ; I don't know how much of its meaning Père Joseph was able to convey, but Matafu has never forgotten either the meeting or the emblem. Mine fell out one day," Rupert touched his breast where, hidden from sight, lay a little cross of silver,

his mother's gift. "You should have seen the effect upon my prisoner! Up till then he would not speak, or notice me. I was putting it back into place, when he made signs for me to let him look closer at the crucifix. Then he broke out in sudden declamation of the wrongs his people suffered, it was like an appeal to Heaven. I am not easily moved, by natives, but before he finished, tears were standing in my eyes, and I was not ashamed of them.

From that moment his manner towards me completely changed. You would have said that some secret influence was at work within him softening his bitter rage. I was the cause of his captivity—he seemed to forget that altogether. These high-bred fellows have a strong sort of instinct or perception: I dare say it told him that I would have given a lot to set him free! The Americans watched us jealously though they did not attempt to get him out of my cabin. Matafu hated the very sound of their footsteps, he became like a figure carved in stone when any one appeared. Alone with me he began to speak quite freely. By Jove, his short pithy sentences gave me a new idea of justice!

The man was a patriot to his back-bone, and he resented the indignities put on his race with all the force of his great wild nature.

I promised to bring him to the Black-robe, who, he

told me, had passed several days close to his camp. All was going on well, I could have got him through without interference, when just at the last Vuni Valu came on board. With him was a white stranger, an upstart who gave himself airs and graces, as if he owned the country, and every man in it! Who, in Heaven's name, is he?"

Rupert's tones were raised in sudden anger.

Marama laid a soft hand over one of his. "Hush; we will talk about him presently. Speak low, Mary is a light sleeper, I don't wish her to be awakened. You say that Matafu *was* a patriot. Where is he now?" Then Rupert told her how the Fijian Chief had died.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

"CHANGE? You think time will ever change me! As well try to change the colour of the rocks," exclaimed Rupert's indignant young voice.

"Who could have put the idea into your head?" was asked by Mary in nervous wonder.

"Who?" he echoed, passionately, "as if a man does not know his own mind!"

"I should hardly call you a man, Rupert;" this was said reflectively, she was considering him for the first time, in a new light: "perhaps because you have always been in my eyes, what I first saw you, a big boy."

"If one is not a man at twenty, one must be simply a fool."

"You could never be that: and you know how much I have always liked you, yes, better than anybody I ever saw till. . . ."

"I want something more than that mere preference, Mary."

"Please do not, you never thought of it before;

(99)

and we have been so happy, since the time my father and mother died, and your mother took me home : you have been the best and kindest friend any girl could wish to have. Perhaps now,"—her tones trembled slightly—"now, I ought to give up calling you Rupert, and say Mr. Camden."

"There shall be no change in the way you address me," he rejoined excitedly, "unless indeed,"—his voice softened, "one day I may persuade you to give me another, a dearer, title."

"Oh, that cannot be ; but whatever happens in the future, you will always be Rupert in my heart. Dear old Captain, trim the sail, or we shall be over in less than a minute."

Their slight canoe was moving briskly, aided by the action of a gentle breeze on a green bough of the beautiful *ivi* tree, which was reared upright against Rupert's shoulder, easily kept in its place by one of his sun-tanned hands. This was a favourite style of locomotion with Mary ; the *sail*, as she persisted in calling the branch, was an improvisation of her childhood.

The young man's brow flushed, his voice grew husky as he answered, "You might have waited for my return ; a girl with proper self-respect does not accept the first fellow who proposes to her, and he a total stranger. Honestly, I believe it would be better for

you to sink with me here ; than to give your love to that supercilious fop, of whom you know next to nothing !”

The crazy craft was whirling dangerously ; it was a critical moment : had Mary shown fear, an overpowering impulse might have urged him in that brief wild instant to go down with her to death.

She looked at him with brave steadfast eyes.

“ If to threaten a girl who trusts you is a proof of manliness, I’m sorry that you have become a man.”

He flung the green branch over-board, and obeying an imperious need of occupation for his hands, caught up the paddle. The canoe shot forward, a rhythmic splash was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Motionless in her place Mary could feel the vibration of his half-frantic energy. She was dimly conscious that those fierce strokes marked a crisis in her life. Were they dealing a death-blow to the innocent and happy companionship, which had in it something more chivalrous than the bond of fraternity, something less selfish than that of love.

The canoe was rapidly cleaving its way to shore, through water so clear and bright, that in its pale green depths each object was distinct ; coral reefs, brilliant coloured fish, and shells, and delicate fern-like weeds showed vividly. One of Mary’s keen delights, when afloat in the bay, was to search for new

beauties in this wondrous sub-marine garden. She had not a glance for it now. She was thinking how to avoid Rupert's clasp, when holding the boat with one hand, he would extend the other as usual to steady her spring to land.

As the keel grated, his angry vigour almost threw the craft upon its side. Quick as thought Mary rose, poised herself for a second, and bounded from it like a chamois; she was ashore as soon as he and was helping him to right the boat.

"Stand clear!" Rupert's voice sounded strangely harsh, his brow wore a heavy frown, the blue veins stood out on his temples, as he hauled the canoe over, and beached her high and dry.

Then his eyes met Mary's watching him in sorrowful surprise.

New sentiments were awakened and possessed his soul melting it to tenderness. He was beside her in an instant, and would have taken both her hands, but her slight gesture and the expression on her face prevented him. He felt the unspoken rebuke.

"I am behaving worse than a savage," he said, "but Mary isn't there some excuse? Say, at least, that you will not engage yourself; now that you know I love you, doesn't it make a difference?"

"It makes me dreadfully sorry," she said earnestly.

Rupert bent towards her with eager eyes. "Don't

be sorry for him, he will go away and get over it. What is the worth of his affection, a few weeks old, compared to mine that has grown with our growth, the fruit of years ; my first, my only love !”

She took a step backward. “You must not talk like this, the affection between you and me has always been that of children. The idea of any other tie has never crossed our minds. It is just a sudden freak on your part that pains me more than I can tell. Oh ! I thought you would wish me joy in . . . in the new life, and instead of that you are making everything miserable.”

“Mary !” his tones sank and became pleading. “You can’t believe that love has been in my heart all the time. No wonder ! I only knew it myself last night when mother stunned me with news of this proposal. It changed my life in a few minutes, just as a hurricane blasts the country it sweeps over, leaving all blackened and desolate.”

Mary’s sad face brightened a little, “The country,” she said, “grows green and smiling a week after the disaster ; so it shall be with our lives ; you will forget all this disturbance, and be my kind, good Rupert again.”

His features became rigid, as if a reptile had stung him.

“If you are not to belong to me altogether, I prefer never to see you more.”



She glanced at him gravely. "Rupert, remember Marama; for her sake we must be as we have always been."

A quick ray of hope re-kindled his eyes. "Then you will be persuaded . . . for her sake?"

"I am persuaded that all will come right, if you will only be patient."

"Nothing will come right if you marry Edgar Devon."

"Oh, please God it will, why, when he spoke to me, I thought if the whole world were before me I would choose him!"

Rupert looked at her glowing features, her eyes brilliant with confidence, and he ground his own white teeth in anguish.

"I distrust him, and what is more I'll never believe that the love of a day is going to last for a lifetime. He has contrived to dazzle you by his fine speeches. Why so much haste? A girl like you can make her own conditions; let him wait, and prove his fidelity before you put your fate into his hands."

"His word is enough," she said proudly, "and all this unjust suspicion makes me rely on him more."

"If you go," Rupert broke out bitterly, "may——"

Mary's hand in a moment was over his lips. "Stop, don't say cruel words, no power on earth can take them back. If you give way to anger now and wish

me harm, evil must strike some one ; it may fall upon us ; it might recoil upon yourself."

Mary's tones vibrated in her almost superstitious anxiety. Rupert caught away her restraining fingers, but touched and softened, continued to hold them in his clasp.

"Be quiet, Mary, no word or wish of mine shall harm you."

"So be it," she cried, "for I pray that evil meant for him may strike me instead."

In their joint lives Rupert had never seen anything like her present agitation. It had the effect of calming his own fierce emotion. In silence they walked the narrow white beach. At the steep path which led upward to the house, he motioned to her to precede him. Mary saw his brows contracted like one in severe pain ; she heard, too, that his elastic step was heavier as he came on behind her.

He never raised his eyes, his outlook was upon a dreary span of years when he would be deprived of her companionship. He saw now, but too clearly, that she had been the brightness of his life. She had supplied the place of comrade, friend, and critic ; nothing had been complete without her. Even his mother's refining influence had acted upon him through Mary. His chivalrous regard for the orphan girl had elevated his nature, and she had known how to pre-

serve his respect. Perhaps, too, because of his natural urbanity he had become accustomed to follow her lead in many of their pursuits and tastes. Objects which she did not covet lost charm in his eyes. Plans which did not win her approval failed to satisfy him. Short years had sped away, and nothing had occurred to interrupt this calm existence. The power of its spell over Rupert was proved by the fact that no desire to change it had come into his mind. He had not sounded the depth of his affection, nor analyzed its nature. Mary was there in his mother's house filling the place of her little lost daughter; so matters might have remained for some time longer, had not Edgar Devon suddenly appeared on the scene of their peaceful lives.

This stranger, so different from the white settlers Mary had hitherto met, and of whom she saw so little. His polished manner, easy self-possession, his refined tones, his knowledge of the world stamped him in her inexperienced judgement with immeasurable superiority.

From the first there had been a subtle charm in his bearing towards her. His unspoken homage followed all she said and did with quiet delicacy, which was intended to reveal to her how deeply she interested and impressed him, by the novelty of her character and surroundings.

At the wicker gate Mary turned round impulsively. "How can I go to Marama unless you will be recon-

ciled! You have never been angry with me in your life. How can she forgive me for making you unhappy! Oh, let us be friends as before," she held both her hands towards him.

Rupert's were tightly locked behind him. At that moment Edgar Devon appeared on the verandah, he had stepped through the open window. Speech was impossible. Without word or salutation Rupert turned away, and disappeared through the grove of palms.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FROM MARY'S POINT OF VIEW.

THAT night Mrs. Camden entered Mary's little room that opened out of her own, and closing the door put her arms round the young girl's shoulders in silence.

"What is it, mother?" Mary asked, as she threw back the long dark hair she was brushing, and raised her eyes to meet those which were gazing at her with a tenderness that merited the title.

"I am not quite happy about this proposal, dear."

"But if I am, you should be."

"It is altogether too hasty and unconsidered; I should take time to ascertain if Mr. Devon's antecedents, his position, and prospects are what he represents, although I believe he is perfectly straightforward."

"Marama! It is too bad of Rupert to set you against Edgar as he has done. If he satisfies me, no one ought to complain."

"Can you leave our well-proved affection, and the home of your childhood for a mere acquaintance made within the last few months?"

"Time does not seem to count," said Mary naïvely ; "there is too much of the whirlwind in my character I know, but what can you expect of a girl who was born in a hurricane ! I must try to give Edgar only the sunlit side of my tropical nature."

"Ah, if I could believe that the sun would always shine for you, child !"

"Never mind about *always* ; why look for storms when the sky is clear ? If we worry over the future how can we enjoy the present ?"

"Mary, be guided in this matter by one who has some experience of life."

"By Rupert ! whose experience has been picked up in these islands . . . . and on a visit to Sydney ?"

"Rupert's discernment is beyond his years, he has a very clear head upon his young shoulders, and he is that most precious gift, a good son ; he has never given me cause for sorrow, Mary. But I was not thinking of him, I spoke of the experience my years have brought me." Tears rose in Marama's eyes as she thought of her own happy married life, and contrasted it with her present desolation.

"What have we to do with tears ?" Mary asked as she dashed hers away, and raised lustrous eyes to the anxious face bent over her so tenderly. "Do not be sad, Marama, I think myself a happy girl, except for having to leave you, and because Rupert is

vexed. When he knows Edgar better he will forgive me and be sorry for his rash judgement. Oh! what is the use of conjuring up fears and fancies; let us all be happy."

"Marriage is not a step to be taken in haste; you are too young to know your own mind, a year is not long to wait, when a life-time is before you."

"A great many changes might happen in a year. I would rather take affection when it is offered and not distrust the giver."

Mary put down her brush with an air of decision, and began to twist her shining tresses into a Grecian knot at the back of her wilful head.

Her foster-mother took the bent head for an instant between her hands, touched it with her lips, and was passing quietly from the room. With a light movement Mary turned and threw both lovely arms around her. "Marama, say that you forgive me, I cannot bear to feel happy when you and Rupert disapprove."

"I only ask you to wait, Mary, say for a year, when you will be seventeen; by the law of your country you are not free to choose until the age of twenty-one."

"Fiji is my country, and we are under no law . . . . except that of mutual forbearance and affection."

"Have I *no* claim upon yours?"

Mary's white arms tightened their hold. "The first claim, my own Marama," she said warmly; "but then everything in life seems so unfair : did not these very islands belong to the natives until we white people stepped ashore and made them ours? Edgar has taken us rather by surprise. I think you and Rupert misjudge him ; to me he appears so perfect that I am now quite at my ease." A pink glow tinted Mary's clear, pale complexion as she made the avowal.

"He may be all that you imagine, my child, yet something says to me, it is better to wait. You see he is not of our Faith."

Marama's soft hand smoothed back the lustrous hair that rippled away from Mary's temples. Her brow was her finest feature, set off by slender dark lines of eye-brow over eyes of brilliant blue. A pensive expression came into them, she was silent for a few moments.

"That is the one reason against him which counts," she said.

"There could scarcely be a more serious obstacle to your marriage. The consequences may not be at first apparent, but they will surely follow, and probably lead to great unhappiness."

"I can't see the gloomy side of things, so long as the bright side turns its face to me," replied Mary. "It says hope on, hope ever, and I *do* hope. You don't



know how much Edgar is learning from Père Joseph ; their long talks, half in English, half in French are not just to keep up the language. Neither of them tells us what is said, which shows that the subject is too deep and personal for ordinary chit-chat."

"I quite agree that he does show respect for religion, and is attracted to the good Father. It would be strange if he were not, being able to understand his speech, and appreciate his character and work. Mr. Devon may do all that without giving one serious thought to his own conversion."

"He is not so far from it as you think," said Mary with confidence.

"Then be content to wait, dear child."

"Let us not say more to-night," she pleaded. "Oh, Marama ! What would you do in my place ?"

"Offer an act of obedience, I hope."

"You mean as a kind of sacrifice ? Heroic actions come so easy to you, I believe you enjoy doing them ; not like me ; all I want is to be happy, and to see others happy !

"Darling, what I say sounds to you like a sermon no doubt, but *duty* is the one road to happiness : difficult and hard to travel it often is, set thick with huge stones, and thorns which cruelly pierce our feet. We must then press forward with patience ; light is awaiting us and relief, together with the great reward

given to those who overcome. The worst is when our path is interwoven, and we hesitate in view of some unforeseen perplexity, our own inclinations calling to us to step aside into the easier way."

"Yes," said Mary, "they are telling me just now that a gift, unexpected as if it fell from heaven, is at my feet, and I want to take it up."

Marama's smile was full of tenderness. "All in good time," she said. "If it is a true affection delay will only prove its depth and value."

Mrs. Camden went through the outer door, shut it and stepped down from the verandah: her motherly instinct seemed to guide her straight to the group of cocoa-nut palms, where stood Rupert, his back propped against one of their lofty stems.

Tall, slight, and straight, his arms were folded over his breast, his gaze was fixed upon a rock that reared itself cone-shaped from the sea like a sentinel keeping guard over the island.

As Marama drew near his eyes swept over her in one eager, questioning glance, and then he neither stirred nor spoke. She laid her beautiful head, with its crown of hair—of which he was so proud—against his shoulder. Memory's swift rush could recall no other occasion in their lives when her son had met her thus, but every thought of self was merged in deep solicitude for him.

"I share your feeling of distrust with regard to Mary's future, but we must not be swayed altogether by forebodings. We have no reason to suppose that Edgar is anything but what he professes to be. His conduct and explanations are honourable and candid. Mary believes in him, and seems bent upon going her own way."

"I, too, must go mine," said Rupert.

A sudden shiver passed through his mother. Fireflies darted from bush to tree spangling the night; they played round the forms of mother and son, flashing their tiny gleams upon them both. One so young, with clouded brow, compressed lips, his dark eyes fixed gloomily upon the rock, his breast filled with bitterness. The other pale with vague apprehension, but calm as a veteran who has confronted and defeated many a foe.

The lines on Marama's forehead deepened somewhat, her sweet sensitive mouth alone betrayed agitation.

"My boy, I never thought that you cared for Mary like this."

"How should you, when I did not know it myself. She was my little Queen, some one to be looked after and protected. This man's coming has opened my eyes to reality."

"No. I think the shock of unexpectedly finding in

our home one who appears to you an intruder, absorbing attention from Mary which has been exclusively your own, this has warped for a time your true feelings towards her. Calm will return and——”

“Don’t, mother, that is just what she said. She asked who put the idea into my mind as I had never thought of it before. How blind I have been! It appears to me that we have deceived ourselves about her all along, calling her still little Mary, and look at her height! We have treated her as a small creature to be humoured and shielded, when all the while she has the spirit and resolution of a man. You who brought her up have surely enough influence to prevent her from throwing herself away upon this stranger?”

“If, on the other hand, her happiness is involved, I ought not to thwart their wishes, unless for a potent reason,” Mrs. Camden answered.

“How is it that she is ready to marry him after this short acquaintance, when she and I have spent half our lives under the same roof, and never thought of it?”

“That is my consolation now, Rupert. This idea has taken you by surprise, it will go as suddenly as it came. We shall be serene and happy again. You will not have Mary’s companionship, but she will always be the trusted friend.”

"Never again! Everything is changed. My heart has grown to her unconsciously as a bush-vine to a Bread-fruit; tear the plant away and it dies, but the tree lives on as if nothing had touched it."

Marama's hands were upon his arm in a clasp of infinite sympathy, she could not trust her voice in speech for a few moments, then the firm, soft tones aroused to action.

"My son, look this trouble manfully in the face, do not increase the pain by dwelling on it; strangle useless regrets. Disappointment comes to most of us some time in our lives, and youth is better able to cope with it than age. Trust my word that time will heal the wound, and you will be the first to wonder that it appeared so deep."

"Let us give up talking," he said, "it does no good. I have lived a whole life-time since yesterday, and now nothing seems *worth while*."

The mother's innate tact kept her silent, but her touch upon his arm was eloquent; in her bruised heart she echoed the pathetic warning that we are told Mexican mothers breathe over their babes. "Child, thou art come into this world to suffer; endure, and hold thy peace."

They stood thus during a long silence. The night's calm beauty had a soothing influence upon minds like theirs, so deeply imbued by faith in the unseen Power

who regulates the lives of His creatures for their ultimate good. A dark shadow had fallen across the path of these two, an unforeseen difficulty had to be faced and overcome.

To "do the right thing," had from childhood been Rupert's chief care. When once the right thing was made clear to his understanding he would never try to shirk it. Simple and manly as his creed sounds, it had cost him many a severe wrench. But this last problem, sprung upon him, brought with it a sense of personal injury which he resented with all the energy of his strong nature.

He was too just and loyal to blame Mary; no, he almost looked upon her as a victim dazzled by the mere superficial attractions of an interloper.

A soft breeze came sighing through the leaves overhead, gently stirring them as if they whispered, and the faint splash of the sea could be heard, as it advanced over the white sands below.

He roused himself from his reverie, and straightened his back from its leaning position. Meeting Marama's eyes, he said to her:

"Do not fear or worry about me, you shall have no cause to be ashamed. I do not forget that I am your son. Mary's happiness is the *one* point to be considered. I am not going to sulk because she gives it into another man's keeping. You and I, mother, have

got to make that secure—if possible. Afterwards, well, nothing will matter much to me.”

They went back together slowly towards the bungalow, her arm within his. Rupert opened the small gate which swung noiselessly upon hinges of native sinnet.

“You are coming in, my son? All is ready in your room, we can continue our talk quite freely there.” He shook his head.

“I have a letter for Père Joseph, forgotten till this moment!” Rupert took it from his breast pocket with dismay, and held it close enough for her to recognize the fine, clear characters of the old priest’s coadjutor.

“I promised he should have it directly I landed; how long is that ago? Yesterday! it seems an age.”

“Timmie can go at day-break,” said Marama, “he would not touch anything so mysterious with his hands, but I will place it securely in the split end of a bamboo, and you may trust him entirely to deliver it to Père Joseph.”

“I will go myself, there are matters to explain concerning their new settlement. The Fathers down there are without provisions, their little stock was stolen by heathens who refuse as yet to learn anything from “*whites*.” Those fellows would kill all the Catholic natives if they dared. But if the priests’ lives are spared, they will gradually overcome oppo-

sition no matter how bitter. In spite of poverty which amounts to destitution, calumny and insults heaped upon themselves and their religion by ignorant and vulgar sects; their lives, their doctrine and their work, prove in time by *whom* they are *sent*. Their zeal and self-sacrifice are a marvel before God and man. I will go down to Père Joseph at once, it gives me something to think about."

"Good angels go with thee," she said wistfully. Scarcely was he out of sight when a sudden fear clutched at her heart; she remembered Matafu's death. His mangled body might be lying fathoms deep, or more probably had fallen a prey to the ever ready shark; but the memory of him would not die. She knew enough of the native race to feel that his followers would not submit tamely to his loss. They would not forgive the ignominy of his end. Upon whom would their vengeance fall if not upon the man who had dared to seize the sacred person of their chief, and bind him in his own hut! That Rupert was liked and respected by every native who knew him, was no guarantee of security. The hostile club could do its work in spite of them; stealthy, subtle, and patient, it could bide its time, but the blow when struck would be fatal.

With a strong effort she calmed herself, aided by the thought that it was impossible for the distant



tribesmen yet to have learnt what had taken place on board the American steamer. Marama re-entered the house, and went to her room, knowing that Père Joseph would not allow Rupert to return that evening, he would gladly offer the humble hospitality of his guest-room ; and brother Pierre, the indefatigable, would second the invitation, and tax the meagre resources of his larder to the utmost in honour of her son.

## CHAPTER X.

### PERE JOSEPH'S INSPIRATION.

DAYS went by during which the missionary boat manned by Catholic natives, in charge of brother Pierre, sailed for Nuku Balavu, freighted with such necessities as could be got together to relieve the pressing need of P  re Joseph's fellow workers. Rupert devoted himself to the equipment, he was rarely seen at the bungalow, but when Marama went down in the freshness of daybreak, she would see him serving Mass in the elegant little church crowded with fervent neophytes. She was consoled and reassured. P  re Joseph's short instructions were heard with rapt attention, his sentences were spoken with power, simplicity, and grace. A tender smile of ineffable charity was on his lips, and his gestures were impressive and winning.

When his voice ceased, another sound rose upon the air with thrilling effect. It was the hymn or the canticle sung by all in perfect time and unison. The harmony of these native voices was extraordinary, there was nothing rough or boisterous in their notes,

rather a tinge of melancholy pervaded. To sing, and chant their prayers seemed a natural instinct, it was the homage of their *meke* in honour of the true God.

One evening, in the small presbytery adjoining the church, Rupert was on his knees. After each absence he had never failed to make his confession with simplicity that from boyhood had endeared him to the venerable director of souls. Père Joseph discerned in this youth the presence of rare qualities that he would have given much to preserve from the world's contamination, and to guide towards the higher life. Time slipped away, the penitent knelt on, for now that he had time to consider his own future a dull sort of apathy hung over it like a pall. He had come there to seek relief from the pressure, and to regain the serenity he had lost. Sunset's glory lingered over a roseate sky, and burnished the sea, before Père Joseph and Rupert came out; they paced side by side along the track, their tones subdued in earnest engrossing talk.

"It seems to me that this is God's opportunity; these events do not happen by chance; He it is who has sent you the trial; it is a test; and He has left you free."

"Free! for what?" asked Rupert hopefully.

They had reached a crossing of the tracks; both stopped; the priest in his old cassock faded to a rusty

brown, but scrupulously neat, turned towards his companion. He laid two fingers of his thin worn hand upon Rupert's sleeve.

"Free, . . . . to come over and help us . . . .," he said, in tones that were strangely impressive.

Young Camden looked at him inquiringly. "Help you, Father? Of course. Forgive me, I quite forgot your garden; Timmie and Lusio shall come over to-morrow, and I'll give them a hand myself lest they should uproot your few, precious European flowers."

"Labourers such as you are needed in this rough vineyard." As he said this, the missionary's earnest eyes glowed, they passed from Rupert's face to gaze over the rippling Bay and distant islets, as though to gather the pagan inhabitants into the Faith then and there.

"Vineyard?" the younger man repeated with some perplexity: there were none in Fiji. The idea struck him that illness was threatening Père Joseph, and had swept his memory back to France, the land of the grape-vine. "Vineyard? You mean the yam plot?"

"I mean the Vineyard of the Lord." The dark vivid eyes returned and met those of Rupert. The two looked at each other in silence for some moments.

Rupert's heart seemed to himself to stand still; then the rapid pulsation felt as if it must suffocate him.

"Labourers strong of will, of mind, of soul and body,"

continued Père Joseph's voice with deeper intensity.

"My God! I have never thought of it," said Rupert in tones of awe.

"Begin. Take time, reflect and pray. Think if you cannot make the sacrifice of temporal things. What are they at best but feverish hopes and joys without stability? With the grace of God you could trample them under your feet, cast them all behind you, reach out and take hold of things eternal, and never throw one glance backward."

"Father, your zeal blinds you, it makes you forget my total lack of training, of qualification . . . I can scarcely grasp the thought, much less could I put it into practice."

"Of your own self, you can do nothing; remember *that* every moment you breathe: but what says our Lord? 'I am the Light of the world, he that followeth Me walketh not in darkness, but *shall have* the light of life.' Ask for a great gift of Divine light; let us ask it together."

Père Joseph's heart yearned over his disciple, upon whom trouble had suddenly descended, but as the cloud parted, he believed it would drift away and leave Rupert free to shake off the yoke of material things and aspire to the highest end. The idea had come to him like an inspiration, it had struck root in his mind with swift tenacity, as he listened to the

young man's story of disappointment and grief. It had been far from his intention to impart this thought as yet; the ground must be prepared; time and patience should do their quiet work of detachment, and the first impulse should come from Rupert's own heart. Then would be his director's opportunity to meet, encourage and uphold. But some power stronger than Père Joseph's judgement had over-ruled, and forced the words from his lips.

He now waited in deep anxiety to hear how they would be received.

Rupert was pale, but quiet determination was expressed on his features: the lines of anger had entirely passed from brow and lips. A great calm looked forth from his tired eyes; these were outward marks borne away from the battle he had fought and won. His voice was very low and clear as he answered.

"If you seriously believe such a thing possible as for me to have a vocation for the religious life, ask it of God for me, and put all your might into the prayer! Mind you, Father, I don't refuse; I don't recoil. It is simply that the proposition is put before me like a 'bolt from the blue.' Your words have opened out a path I never dreamed of for myself. If it had been my own idea, I should have thought it wild presumption to imagine myself capable of such work as yours."

"That is as it should be; humility is the surest foundation, God fashions his Saints upon it. This is not a question to be decided in a moment"—again the slender, sinewy fingers emphasized the words—"although sometimes conviction comes swift as a lightning flash."

"If I am worthy to come ever, it must be soon, not after trying other pursuits; a whole life should be given—not a fragment. At my age you were well on your way in the novitiate."

"Yes, it is good to begin early, but some of ours, even of our best, have joined after active service on the world's battle fields. My coadjutor down there,"—Père Joseph pointed south—"was a distinguished cavalry officer; he left his medals and his Cross of the Legion d' honneur with our Lady of Fourvieres, when he took leave of his country for ever. The zeal of his great heart outvies ours who have borne the burden of the day and the heats."

"There is no doubt about your burdens spiritual and temporal; my earliest recollection is of you and Father Hilary working at your buildings. I remember how you sawed timber in the forest for the church, and carried it on your shoulders over every kind of impediment, without help from anybody."

"Yes, in the beginning we must do all such things, we ask nothing from the natives, as you know; we

wait patiently till they offer service of their own accord. Our converts help us grandly in the end. Ah! I was young in those days, and now am old; we pioneers do not last long. Hilaire was soon called to his reward; but, *Deo gratias*, there are recruits ready to fill up vacancies, though not all have special gifts adapted to the work."

"How can you suppose that *I* possess any of the necessary gifts."

"Because I have known you from your childhood. Point number one, you are *thorough*; perseverance is a feature in your character, and tenacity of purpose; witness the capture of Matafu. You can endure hardship, and have skill and courage. Magnanimity too, for you forgave that chieftain, and would have saved his soul, and himself from punishment. You know the native language, can speak fluently, and can appeal to the nobler feelings of this intelligent race. Although you have never been in England you are an Englishman at heart, and understand how to deal with your countrymen. These are a few useful qualities which, joined to the essentials, faith, hope, and charity, moved by the grace of God, vowed to His service, might do great and lasting work. How much you might accomplish. I need not now dwell upon the difficulties to be met and conquered. You would have to join our novices at Lyons where all would be



foreign, and perhaps not to your taste. Should you shrink from that?"

"If I really believed myself called to the life, I should shrink from nothing that other men can do."

This answer lighted the priest's eyes with a quick gleam of appreciation. "The long journey is expensive," he added thoughtfully.

"Not to me, I could work my passage as an able seaman before the mast if necessary, but it would not be, as I know enough of navigation to go as third officer on board a home-bound ship. Have you thought of Marama?" he asked suddenly, his energetic hands falling slack to his sides.

"There has been no time to think," said Père Joseph, with a break in his voice.

"Is she to lose us both at one stroke? You know Mary is not going to stay in these islands; who then is to care for her in old age?"

"The good God. He has made her what she is, and has brought her safely through greater perils than she is likely to encounter again. It would, I think, be unwise to broach the subject to her until you know your own mind, and see the way quite clear. If after time, reflection, and prayer, you decide to make a trial, I do not fear for her. She has a spirit capable of making every sacrifice, even to giving up her only

son, if it be for the glory of God, and to reap His harvest among the souls of men."

These were brave words in Marama's honour! yet Père Joseph's eyes were dim as he pronounced them; for memory lifted the veil from his own mother's face, as he had seen it for the last time, when she sank on her knees to kiss his feet, who was her son indeed, transformed into an apostle; going forth to probable martyrdom; and whose loved features, she was never again to behold on this earth.

Both men were silent. The sound of a sweet-toned bell vibrated in the stillness. One of Père Joseph's small acolytes was ringing the Angelus with precisely the same stroke as may be heard all over the world wherever a Catholic priest has penetrated, and been able to raise a building and a bell.

It was the only one at that period in the township, and marked time for many persons who were quite ignorant of its meaning.

"I feel that you far over-rate my powers," Rupert said, "and once embarked, how terrible to fail."

"Banish the thought of failure, it weakens effort. If you should fail—which God forbid—well, it would simply show that your vocation is to another state of life."

After a pause Père Joseph said with great gentleness, "One thing more I want to tell you, because it

will help to reassure you about Mary's prospects. It is that Edgar Devon has good dispositions, and some knowledge of the Faith. We may hope and must pray that very soon he will find the way. He is reverential, and that brings him far. For the salvation of the scoffer one always fears, but never have I heard from this Englishman one slighting or cynical word on the subject of religion. Lately he has inquired seriously of our doctrine. God works unseen miracles in the human heart, who shall say that He has not already begun to draw that soul, and has charged Mary with a special mission to edify it by her example and by her precept? Nevertheless, I pray that she may not consent to be his wife until they can kneel before the altar one in faith. There can be no security in a marriage where division exists on such a vital point. Day by day the breach must widen, till it becomes a dark gulf between the two souls. The bridge of indifference carelessly thrown across, is a frail thing, liable to give way at any moment, and in a crisis break . . . . But we are not going to look upon the seamy side of this, or any other question,"—Père Joseph's smile was radiant,—“we go straight with the confidence of children to our Father in Heaven, who is able, and has promised to give more abundantly than we can ask or think. And we pray, using all the means He has provided to make known to us His

will. We continue to pray for grace to fulfil it. That done, all is safe here and hereafter. I count upon you to serve my Mass to-morrow. Tony and Francis are devout little angels, but their Latin is as yet faulty."

"I'll be there at day-break," said Rupert, taking off his hat, leaving exposed a very fine well-balanced head. The priest had uncovered, too, and raising his right hand made the holy Sign as he gave his solemn and ardent blessing to the disciple who stood at the great mental juncture of his life. Rupert's feet were upon a crossing of tracks, so was his mind. Before its vision lay a gentle incline leading to the ordinary level of mankind. The other path climbed unmeasured heights. His decision was made. Adieu; yes, good-bye to the flowering plain, he would strike upward with resolute steps for the stern but nobler life.

## CHAPTER XI.

ROA-ROA.

How the next few months were got over nobody concerned in this story cares to recall. Timmie and Lusio exchanged their experiences with bated breath, wondering what had come to their patrons.

Instead of preparations they had been told to expect for an exodus to the big plantation before the hurricane season set in, no further mention was made of the place, or of plans. The native servants were not told that their young *Turanga* had found a tenant to take it off his hands for a term of years; they were, however, aware that his good cutter "Sea-bird," had sailed, for the first time without him. It was sold.

Then Timmie began to be as uneasy as his buoyant nature would permit: he took to tracking his young master by stealth, like a faithful dog that has been forbidden to follow. Timmie felt that a mysterious change was creeping over the old life; some influence that he could not detect was about them; he began to connect it with Edgar Devon's re-appearance at the bungalow. *Devalo*, as Timmie called the magni-

ficient stranger whose dress and bearing inspired him with a loveless respect.

One morning Timmie awoke to behold a hideous sea monster, one of the kind sighted by his people on rare occasions, at long intervals, and always with fear. It appeared in the port gliding swiftly through the water, emitting a cloud of black breath, like a demon. Timmie expected to hear a roar from its gaping throats—he knew the sound—but on this occasion they were dumb.

Père Joseph's heart leaped with joy to recognize a French battle-ship. He soon learned that the Vicar Apostolic was on board, making a round of the various mission-stations among the groups of islands in the South Pacific. Père Joseph did not yet know that a member of his Order, the devoted band of Marists, had recently won the crown of martyrdom. In course of time this was reported by the Bishop to the French Admiral then in command of the station at Tahiti. He immediately placed one of his ships at the prelate's service, to enable him to visit and protect the sons of France who were distributed in pairs, with their faithful lay-brother companions, engaged as it were against the powers of darkness.

The worst evil they had to encounter was the hostility, not of pagan, but of protestant natives instigated by their ministers, whose opposition was

marked by such bitterness as to scandalize the pagans themselves. Many of these last were deterred from joining what they believed to be the true religion, by fear of their protestant chiefs, their allegiance to whom is so great, that if a chief goes to perdition in a false religion his vassals feel bound to follow him.

This unlooked for arrival was Providential in more ways than one. It raised Catholic prestige in the eyes of scornful neighbours, for behold the Catholic Chief had come, not in the small mission vessel, badly equipped, struggling against wind and wave ; but on a great battle-ship, supported by the authority of his country, and protected by its standard.

To Rupert the advent was a direct indication of the path he was to travel. The difficulties he was prepared to meet were melting away like snow-flakes under sunbeams. One event fitted in with another, and left the road before him clear.

Père Joseph and he now learned that the long voyage to Europe would not be necessary.

Rupert could enter the noviceship in New Zealand, where a house for English-speaking subjects was being founded, and the prelate would himself introduce this promising aspirant.

It was therefore decided that Rupert would leave with him on board the "Eclair."

For successive days the little church was the scene

of incidents and ceremonies touching as they were dignified. On all occasions the edifice was filled to its utmost capability, and a zealous throng knelt outside. Their unity and discipline were seen even here, all making the sign of the Cross as by one hand, none before or after the others. News of the Bishop's arrival got wind; Catholic natives came in from afar, a miniature fleet of wild, free skiffs sped about the harbour bringing recruits to be blessed, and confirmed in their faith, and to take part in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction, Chanting of the Rosary and Litanies. Native intelligence grasps quickly the significance of sacred vestments, pictures, and medals. In Stations of the Cross the history of their redemption is made visible to their observant eyes. The Crucifix rarely fails to make a deep impression. These they understand to be aids to devotion not objects to be adored, and serve only to enhance the homage given to the Real Presence on the altar, and in Communion.

One great personage held himself entirely aloof from these demonstrations.

During the Vicar Apostolic's visit Vuni Valu never appeared; he retired to his island home and there remained while the "Eclair" was in port.

His house stood at a certain distance from the group occupied by members of his family, it was



distinguished by its superior height, and was raised on a more solid foundation. The uprights were tall columns, stems of the tree-fern, the walls were of great thickness formed by masses of thatch tied to bamboo rods, the whole bound and fitted together with precision and skill.

At one end the floor was raised to form a daïs. This was the place of honour occupied by the king, whereon he invited any guest of sufficient importance to whom he chose to show favour. It was provided with piles of mats, those uppermost being of very fine texture and workmanship; they formed a luxurious resting place. The interior was clean, the air refreshingly cool, the dense thatch on walls and roof giving effectual protection from the heat outside. A splendid *ivi*-tree helped to shade the upper end of the house with its abundant and beautiful foliage; there were no windows, but several door-ways gave sufficient light and air.

Here it was that Vuni Valu received Monseigneur and Père Joseph, who with due Fijian etiquette had sent on a messenger to announce their visit of ceremony. The king's outward courtesy responded to their own, he bade them welcome, and his look upon the "black-robés" was very kindly; but after some expressions of good-will, his replies were brief, he became grave, preoccupied and reserved.

When the visitors rose to take leave, Vuni Valu said to Monseigneur with great dignity, "In this my country your followers are free to practise their *lotu*, they shall not be disturbed by me or mine."

Monseigneur replied that his priests and followers had suffered much opposition in the past, and even cruel treatment, but he had confidence now in the great chieftain's word, and felt sure that he would maintain it.

This answer seemed to gratify Vuni Valu and yet in some way to augment his uneasiness.

When the visitors had gone he sat moody and silent apparently forgetting his secretary whom he had summoned to be present at the interview; this gentleman was leisurely moving towards the nearest door when the king's voice arrested him.

"Except for my word given to those others, I would go and see this *Lotu Katolika* with my own eyes, and hear it with my ears. I am troubled when I look upon these men, they are not as others, I am moved when I hear of their great doings. Why are there two Christian *Lotus*? How can both be true when each declares the other false? My teachers say theirs is right, they spit out venom upon the black-robcs; they say to me, drive them out at the point of your spears! Then I gave my word not to look into the *Katolika's* church, nor listen to their teaching. I see they are

men of peace, yet they know not fear. They do not covet with their eyes, they do not seize with their hands; upon their lips are no words but those of goodness. I cannot go to hear them, yet will I not forbid these men of gentle ways. *Edala*, speak, are you of their *lotu*?"

Edgar objected to the uncomplimentary use of his surname, as rendered by the Fijian tongue; Vuni Valu had been told to use the other. The result was on state occasions *Ratu Edala*.

"Are you of their *lotu*?" was repeated, before an answer came.

Then Edgar spoke, "Yes, and no;" was his curt reply.

The king's brows knit in perplexity. "Yes, and no," he echoed; an expression of fine scorn crossed his features, his gesture was eloquent. "I have told my people you are *tamata ndina* (a man indeed), I said wrong, for any Fijian child could have given a better answer, it would have said one or the other, not both."

"Between you and me," said Edgar, "this *lotu* question is *tabu*, sacred, not to be touched: from the first I gave you to understand, that I would only help you in state affairs, business and manners."

"True," rejoined the king; he added reflectively; "without religion a man is no more than a pig;" his

glance had fallen upon one of his own animals, which at that moment suspended its quest for succulent roots and half-eaten cocoa-nuts to look inquisitively through a door-way in the royal residence. "Before the whites came we had our Fijian *lotu*; every man followed it without dispute; we fought plenty, we fought often, but our wars were for other things. The Christian *lotu* is high as heaven," Vuni Valu's left hand gave a grand upward sweep, "but white men wrangle over it, they make very big talk to us, they obey it not themselves. I, Vuni Valu, say now, it is a bad trick to spite these black-robcs, who tell me their authority to teach comes straight down from Peter, who got it from the great Lord's own lips."

"I believe they are right," said Edgar Devon, speaking very seriously, "that is why I said yes to you just now; *no* was because I have not yet taken the oath to practise that belief. Before many suns have set I will, then you can take back the reproach flung at me, for I shall no longer be a man without religion."

Vuni Valu's searching eyes turned upon him, as if to wrest the truth from his soul.

"Good for you," he said slowly, "but the Christian *lotu* should be the same for all; if Peter had the law, 'those others' should never have left him!" Vuni Valu made a movement of both arms as if to clear away some vaporous obstacle. "My heart is sick: I

thought peace was planted amongst us for ever, that all men would be of one mind ; that none would lie, cheat, quarrel or rob. I am deceived. The whites have brought us knives, fire-water, guns, irons, ropes, many axes and cutting things. Peace has not come yet. I begin to think we were better as before. My heart is sick . . . I want now . . . to sleep . . . and . . . to forget."

Vuni Valu stretched his powerful limbs upon his pile of mats, there was something regal in all his movements ; to Edgar Devon's mind there was great pathos in the old Chief's expression of his disappointed hopes. He could not readily find words to reassure him, so the intimation that his presence was no longer necessary, was a relief ; he had to sail back to the township. A warning gust of wind had already rushed over the thatch, rustled the leaves of the ivi-tree, and passed away ; its voice must not be disregarded. Men with his boat were awaiting him on the narrow beach, they were quite capable of starting without him as a measure of prudence if he dallied too long.

"Sa moce,\* sleep well," was his friendly salutation, as he stepped forth into the sunlight with easy grace.

He had reasons of his own for wishing to get back

\*C is used to represent the sound th.

quickly, there was to be a last consultation at the presbytery. Rupert Camden would be present, on the morrow he would be gone. The youthful guardian, aided by Père Joseph's practical suggestions had set himself the task of safe-guarding the interests of his ward as far as in him lay. The outcome of Edgar's acquaintance with the "colonial cub" was to develop a very sincere liking for him. He found in Rupert an absence of formality which was pleasing, he was neither uncouth nor awkward, he was frank not familiar; he evidently knew his own mind and had the gift of speaking it clearly without using a word of slang. His courtesy was too natural to be quite English, and his quiet self-possession baffled the more experienced man's attempts to put him out of countenance. These ceased after a few encounters. Edgar Devon yielded to a genuine feeling of admiration; he changed his tactics entirely, and began to observe Rupert with as much attention as if he, like Vuni Valu, were a hitherto unknown species of mankind to the seasoned European traveller.

As soon as Rupert had arranged preliminaries he had quietly prepared his mother for the step he was about to take. He had chosen an hour when others had retired for the night, it was the time for their usual talk, for by tacit mutual consent they avoided

the favourite old path which led to the nearest group of palms, and they almost deserted the verandah. Mats were lowered over the windows, and the lamp was alight in Marama's pretty sitting-room. Rupert held one of her hands in his own as he unfolded his plan, in clear simple words that left no room for doubt of its feasibility, wildly improbable, as she would otherwise have believed it to be.

As the full import of his purpose dawned upon her, every vestige of colour faded from her face, her lips whitened as if an unseen weapon had reached her heart. It had ; and by one stroke had killed all the hopes she had built up, for the renewal of her own happiness, in witnessing that of her children.

Just as in former years her vivid imagination had pictured the plantation in Fiji, "ready made," so had it mirrored before her Rupert's future, and his home.

In her day-dreams even the form and features of a little being were quite familiar to her mental gaze ; she loved the cherub head covered with rich, soft, curling hair that she could almost feel nestling against her bosom. In fancy she had often kissed the sweet rosy mouth that should call her "Grannie."

A dense curtain fell over that vision and shut it out for ever.

But Marama's spirit sprang to lofty aims, as a perfect musical instrument responds to the touch of a master.

In a moment she recognised that her son had chosen the "better part." Every thought of self was dominated by reverence and awe.

She was so pale that Rupert's hands caught her shoulders—he thought she was about to faint—one look into her eyes reassured him.

In their shining depths he saw the enthusiastic love, and the encouragement with which she had ever met and urged on a noble effort.

This wealth of sympathy was perhaps the most beautiful trait in her character. She never damped ardour, or made difficulties, or raised obstacles, or checked action in a good cause. It was her gift to encourage, to stimulate, to cheer; she possessed the sweet faculty to raise a drooping heart, and to revive confidence when by intuition she saw it was like to fail.

So when she had taken counsel of Père Joseph, and poured out her soul at the foot of the Cross, she gave up her only son to be tried in the crucible, she renounced her own claim upon him; she presented him to God in all the beauty and strength of his early manhood; and she offered every beating of her heart to obtain his perseverance and success.

Subsequent days rushed by only too quickly, the hour of parting was at hand. The last long talk overnight was chiefly upon Mary's prospects, and what



had been done to brighten them. Before leaving him to repose, his mother tenderly blessed him in the name of the Holy Trinity: to the last day of his life he could feel her firm, soft hands upon his head. Rupert would have dissuaded her from coming down to the beach to see him off, but gave way when he saw she was bent upon it. Her state was that of calm exaltation, she forgot self entirely, her one care was that nothing should be said or done to agitate or distress him.

Just as he anticipated nearly all the inhabitants, white and bronze, were collected to watch the majestic war-ship get up steam and move slowly out to sea.

The Vicar Apostolic was already on board; one of the ship's boats, the last to leave shore, would take the young planter, whose destination was unknown to all but the four initiated, his mother, Père Joseph, Mary and Edgar. These four were grouped about him, Timmie standing at a respectful distance when the signal was given; all was ready. Mary impulsively took his hands, and held them fast. "Oh, Rupert, you have been my good and true guardian as long as I can remember! God and our Lady reward you."

"May He bless you both, dear girl, and I believe He will." Rupert's smile was beautiful as it was brave. He turned to Marama, who came forward, and took her in his arms.

"My own beloved," she whispered, "your mother's heart is with you every moment of the day praying that you may be worthy . . . to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

Rupert's fine head was uncovered; he spoke no word, kissing her with infinite reverence, he gave one, long deep look into her eyes, and sprang down to his place in the boat.

It rocked idly for a few seconds. A quick word of command rang out, the oarsmen pushed off, then bent to the oars with steady stroke; the boat shot forth straight as a dart dipping gracefully over the smoothly heaving waves.

With a rush, a leap, a splash, Timmie threw himself into the sea, and was swimming fast and high.

"Go back," Rupert shouted huskily.

The native came on with increasing vigour; soon his eager hand clutched at the gunwale and held it. A sailor caught up an implement to strike at the intruder's fingers. Rupert stopped him with a quick gesture, and himself took hold of the brown wrist.

"What is it, Timmie?"

"I come, too."

"No. Go back to Marama."

"She has Melili."

"Go back, I say. What is wrong with you?"

"On 'Seabird' cutter, I know where Turanga go, now he board man-o'-war ; I come, too."

"Understand me, Timmie," was Rupert's stern command, "you are to go back to Marama, and wait for me with her. *Wait.*"

"Till to-morrow?" asked the poor fellow pleadingly.

"*Till I come.*"

Rupert loosened the man's fingers, they relaxed at his touch ; Timmie dropped astern to let himself drift towards the beach, he turned his dejected face several times to repeat the pathetic *roa-roa*, till to-morrow."

Marama and Mary were returning to the bungalow hand-in-hand, causing no surprise or comment. It was quite natural in the eyes of the few natives who passed them on the way that one should "lead the other by the hand." Edgar and Père Joseph, with sympathetic delicacy had walked away together.

"It is a strong step that young fellow has taken."

"He is a strong man," said Père Joseph, "yet he may return sooner than we think ; after a few months perhaps ; we can never be sure of a vocation until it is tried."

"He is altogether uncommon ; how on earth has he learned to be a gentleman in this wilderness?"

The missionary's smile was compliant, and half humorous. "Not only a gentleman ; by the grace of

God, he is even more than that, he is a devout Catholic."

"Greatly to his credit," and, without giving Père Joseph time to say what rose to his lips, Edgar continued: "of course, I see now what has helped so materially to mould his character, yet he must constantly have been remote from your influence, and that of his mother, and—speaking as a man of the world—I should have scarcely thought it powerful enough to counteract the tendency of other surroundings, not to mention evil example given by older men."

"His aloofness from them, and his contempt for idleness are advantages that have served him well; but . . . his—abiding sense—of the Divine Presence—has been his protection and his safeguard."

"Certainly the Catholic faith has a very refining effect," as he said this Edgar was hardly conscious how critical was his own look at the priest. If Père Joseph felt it, he was not easily moved by the judgment of men.

"There is always plenty of room for improvement," he said winningly, "we must keep *going on* towards perfection, she will not come to us, laggards have small chance of attaining her! My young friend was fortunate in both his parents; from the old land they brought with them the refinement of gentle blood, the ideas and the education of their time, and they main-

tained the high level during their colonial experiences."

"Which in her case, have added a fresh charm to her character," Edgar put in cordially, "it is however, remarkable that they should have been able to transmit so large a measure to their son, who has not enjoyed his parents' advantages of education and social life."

"We owe much to our parents," Père Joseph said, "it is of first importance that a man's mother should be good; when the *mothers* in a country deteriorate, canker in that nation has begun and will continue to corrode, slowly, perhaps, but inevitably."

"Then reform must begin with the man," said Edgar, "a good man's influence is incalculable, he is in the vanguard, his example reaches farther. Woman has, perhaps, greater power of resistance to evil, her temptations are not so insistent as ours. Women are imitative, they adapt themselves readily to the tone around them; again, whatever they may say or think to the contrary, they are guided almost entirely by the opinions and example of men. So, I say, when a nation is on the downward grade, reform the man."

"You can never do that without the aid of his mother," was Père Joseph's emphatic response; he had a true Frenchman's veneration for the maternal bond.

"Strange," continued Edgar, "how little one reflects

on these serious subjects while in the swim with the world, we just float on the stream of prevailing fashion—there are fashions of thought, just as in dress—we follow those not heeding where we shall drift. I have thought more during my stay in Fiji, than in all the previous years of my life.”

“Well, now, to put these good reflections into a practical shape, can you not *decide* to join us, and enter the Catholic fold?”

“I was about to tell you, Father, that Vuni Valu has helped me to reach that conclusion.”

“Vuni Valu! but he is a determined Protestant.”

“So much the greater pity that ‘those others,’ as he calls them got hold of him first, for he is an honest thinker, and a right good sort.”

“Is it possible that the Bishop’s visit——” Père Joseph began eagerly.

“No, no, mon père, I am afraid you must not count on a change there.”

“But what then?”

Edgar silently pointed to his own breast.

“Ah—h. I so hoped you might see your way while Monseigneur was with us, to receive and confirm you.”

“That is an after thought. You can assist me more just now, in this difficult preparation, which I wish to make very thoroughly. When I am ready you must ask Mrs. Camden to be present to hear my abjuration

of error ; she has had more to do with it than she knows ; what Marama began, I wish Père Joseph to complete."

"And Mary?" he asked, "she will come, too?"

"No ; let it be a surprise for her ; I want to banish from my mind all reference to her in this matter ; it is, and shall be a distinct act of pure conviction."

The Marist's thin, worn features were illumined by holy joy, he was silent for some moments in deep recollection.

"Bien, bien, c' est admirable. Laus Deo !" he said softly. When he was quite happy, Père Joseph had no English.

Marama and Mary had almost arrived at their home, neither had spoken.

At length Mary asked with a new timidity, "Am I in any way to blame?"

Marama's head gave a gentle negative movement.

"He was not driven from you by—— what I have done?"

"Driven?"

A proud flush mounted to Marama's pale face ; slowly it faded out, her tones were low and sweet as ever.

"Neither you nor I could have changed anything, dear child. Events are a secret of God's Will, we

have to act in them to the best of our ability. His Voice has called. My Rupert, with the prompt obedience of a soldier of the Cross, has answered, 'I am here.' "

She went alone straight to his little room, closed the door behind her, and leaning against it looked round.

Surawaia had been at work and put in order all that her mistress allowed her to touch. A common wooden chair was beside the long, narrow bed. When Marama knocked this morning, he was sitting there fully dressed, fastening on his shoes. She went forward and rested on it. The light coverings had been lifted from his couch, the pillow had been untouched and still bore the impression of his head. With a yearning cry she stretched her arms out over it, burying her face : " my son, my son ! "



## CHAPTER XII.

### ANOTHER ARRIVAL.

It was a fact, not easy to explain in those uncivilized regions, that when a war-ship of one nation appeared, it was followed after a short interval by that of another country. Communication was so irregular, means of circulating news almost lacking ; the coincidence was probably due to the circumstance that several nations had subjects living on the different islands, which were as yet neutral ground, not officially annexed. Be that as it may, only a few weeks after the *Eclair* steamed out of Levuka harbour, the *Alert* came in on her track, and soon let everybody know that she was there.

Vuni Valu, and his prime minister, Ratu Edala, lost no time in going on board. When they left, booming echoes were awakened by a Royal salute of twenty-one guns fired in honour of the native king. The sounds, mysterious as terrible, reverberated on the hearts of his dusky people with foreboding of dire evil. The king looked supremely satisfied ; pointing back at the cannon he grimly observed, "When mouths like

those speak for Vuni Valu, his rebel chiefs must lie down."

Before Edgar Devon left the gangway, his hand was grasped in that of his near kinsman, Commodore Bracebridge, whose hearty ringing voice said: "Come along I'll take you for a cruise; you have got an astonishing grip of their speech, such a coadjutor is just what I want. When the hurricane season is over I'll drop you here again if you like, but by that time you will have had enough of the South Pacific and will not want to waste any more of your life acting in this burlesque. I must say you've done it very well; no doubt you've been a benefactor to your fellow countrymen, and kept things quiet for them."

"The benefits have been on my side, as I shall presently show you," was the smiling reply.

The Commodore laughed. "It seems to agree with you, I never saw a man look in better form; come along and write a book to uphold the claims of the noble savage; you can do it on board; better be quick about it, or the claims will be over-looked."

"I'm afraid so in the end. The *whites* are keen after *their* interests, and those are contradictory; each group defends its own and would exclude the others; each gives the native a different law, and would force him to obey. He gets puzzled, being straight and logical in his notions; these conflicting orders stagger

him, he becomes exasperated and thinks his only chance is to defy them all."

"Poor mortals! some of them have cause. We have been reconnoitring a few of the remote islands, I find that the treatment they have received at the hands of traders has filled the native mind with distrust, they are not able to recognize an honest man when they see him. This place is more in touch with the outer world, I suppose there are a certain number of responsible and decent settlers in it?"

"I can introduce you to at least one family which you will find *unique*."

"I can quite believe it," laughed the Commodore.

"Wait till you see."

"What? Are you serious? My dear boy I shall have to take you out of danger!"

"There is no danger, all is safe; you arrive in time to congratulate me."

The Commodore's genial laugh gave way to a frown, and a piercing glance of inquiry.

"Don't say that you've made a fool of yourself." This in very low tones.

"I make no statement so untrue," returned Edgar with imperturbable good humour.

His Uncle looked dubious,

"Your proceedings are altogether so queer, I begin to feel concerned for the honour of the family."

"Believe me, my share of the family honour is in safe keeping," was the confident reply.

"I am not so sure of that as I should like to be ; you've had your way a long time ; knocked about the world as you please. Still there are duties and responsibilities connected with your property and position in the old country. I do not say you have neglected those—yet it is time that you settled to something more useful than doing Mentor to this native king."

• "That is precisely my own opinion, and I have acted in accordance with it."

The Commodore gave his nephew another glance of interrogation.

"Do you mean me to understand that you are actually married to anyone *here*?"

Each syllable was enunciated in clear, cutting accents delivered in the same low tones.

"Not yet, but the ceremony will I hope very shortly take place . . . in the little Catholic church over there, see, you can get a glimpse of the quaint bell-turret."

"Catholic church !" with slow incredulous amazement.

"Yes ; R. C. Roman and real."

"You have not had a sunstroke surely?"

"No, these pandanus hats are a first-rate protection." Edgar took his off and twirled it skilfully on one

finger before replacing it ; “ we don’t go about much in the heat. I am generally up with the dawn, which is a very enjoyable time here.”

“ Oh . . is it ? well, come on board again to-morrow, come alone, please—we will finish our talk then in my cabin.”

They shook hands, the Commodore turned away his well-knit form rather slackened ; he retired to ponder for a short time over this unexpected meeting, and quickly made up his mind as follows. “ I shall not countenance the affair by going ashore to meet these people. He might have married *anybody* in his own class, and he perversely chooses a girl, a widow perhaps ! from Fiji, an R. C. forsooth ! There’s no excuse, he is old enough to know better. I shall hear of course what he has to say for himself . . . and take the wind out of his sails if I can.”

After their subsequent interview the kind-hearted sailor’s natural geniality conquered his extreme distaste for Edgar’s revelations ; he afterwards steered clear of the subject with masterly dexterity, and avoided all invitations. He asked his nephew, as a personal favour to accompany him on a short cruise of investigation, as his acquired knowledge of native customs, and speech would be of the utmost value.

This Edgar said must depend upon Mrs. Camden’s wishes. “ Let me have the gratification of making

you known to her, and to her adopted daughter," he suggested pointedly.

The Commodore was firm, not to say stubborn in his refusal.

"Your refusal places me in an awkward position, as I cannot declare our relationship unless you consent to visit Mrs. Camden or to send her an invitation through me," Edgar urged.

"It is from no want of courtesy on my part, I simply have no time to give to social duties just now, being under orders to make a tour of these Islands, and send in a report to the Home Government. I promise to be presented to your friends on my return if you then desire it."

"Have I not succeeded in making quite clear to you that I am engaged to Miss Sinclair?"

"She may change her mind—women do."

"She may—when the stars cease to shine."

"Or, when another star appears on her limited horizon," was his uncle's mental rejoinder.

The bungalow had almost resumed its wonted aspect. The piano was re-opened and might often be heard in the short twilight giving out delicate reveries under Marama's sympathetic touch.

Mary and Edgar, occupying chairs on the verandah, listened through the open French window, and drew closer, so that the soft murmur of their voices might

not interrupt the music which formed a delightful accompaniment to their talk.

"Do your sisters take care of your house, and things, all this time while you are teaching Vuni Valu how to reign over us?"

"An Agent looks after the property, old servants are on the place," he answered with a subdued laugh. "I have no sisters."

"What a blessing!"

"You strange child, why?"

"Because there will be nobody to find fault, and to make you feel ashamed of me."

"No mortal alive could do that!"

"Oh, yes; it is quite likely that I shall make stupid mistakes at first. Are there uncles, aunts, and cousins?"

"A few."

She breathed a sigh. "Girl cousins?"

"Yes, they are married."

"That is a relief; they will have their own occupations and will not trouble themselves about me. Will any of them inspect me through glasses, those disagreeable *pincés-nez* I mean, a French officer wore one?"

"An uncle will probably screw a monocle into his best eye for the purpose of criticism."

"It will make him look very impertinent."

"Rather concentrated on one side of his face, vague on the other."

"I hope he will turn the vague side to me."

"He will flash the other on you like a policeman's lantern."

"To detect my sins against the rules of English society; could you not keep relatives away until I am used to life in England, I soon shall be."

"They will be far too curious to see the novelty from the South Pacific to listen to any of my excuses."

"Then you must protect me. I will take all the hints you can give, and receive any reproofs you may choose to make . . . but if other people begin to lecture me, I shall walk out of the room."

"That exit will be worth seeing," he said as he watched her changing and *piquante* face with tenderest amusement. "It will be only fair to warn my people to be on their best behaviour, as a very imperious princess will shortly be in possession, and she intends to be Lord of the Manor."

"Now you are quizzing me, and this is really serious, I have not thought of your relatives before."

"Don't think of them yet, for you have to decide a very important question. What answer am I to give to Commodore Bracebridge?"

"From all accounts," she said in a depreciative



tone,—“he would be rather a surly travelling companion. The French officers were more polite, they came to pay us a visit, and offer their *homages* to Marama ; it was very pretty to see them do it ; she looked quite young when she was talking to them.”

“And what did you do, may I ask?”

“I listened in admiration, and wished, oh ! how I wished *you* would walk in—to outshine them all—except their shoes,” she added ingenuously.

“Were their feet so very small?”

“Quite the neatest I have ever seen.”

“How have you learned to be so observant?”

“By taking notice of everything I see. We *must* read signs all around us ; in the sky, the sea, the tracks, the trees, the canoes, the settlers, and the natives . . or we might be taken by surprise. Now that I think of it, most things that happen are so surprising that we never feel astonished.”

“Which explains colonial coolness in an emergency,” he added. Then leaning eagerly forward, “My own, give me all your attention ; the question you must decide is . . . how soon may I ask Père Joseph to bless our marriage?”

She was grave directly.

“We must not speak of it yet.”

“Yes, Marama gives me leave ; she would prefer a longer delay because of your youth ; but remember I

was kept in long uncertainty, then, on these months of probation, and now unless you will allow me to take you home as my wife, I am bound to go on this Government cruise. Come *now*, Mary."

"It would be wicked of me to leave Marama yet. I am very selfish—as you will find out—but not so bad as that. No, I stay by her until she has grown accustomed not to expect Rupert, or to think of his coming. That old habit of listening has returned lately," she added in a whisper.

"Not for him surely?"

"No . . . . for . . . . for that other footstep."

"Ah! poor Marama," he said with deep compassion.

Mary continued. "She, Rupert, and you have each done something heroic, and difficult; for a grown-up Protestant to become Catholic must be very difficult! Let me pick up a scrap of merit somewhere, or I shall feel like a Cinderella amongst you all. Edgar . . . . you must go on this weary cruise whilst I stay by Marama!"

"Is it then so easy to part? Does it cost you so little to send me away? In the hurricane season, too," he asked reproachfully.

She covered her pretty small ears, placing a hand over each.

"No, no, it costs me very much, but I am not able

to argue the point against you; it has to be done; for the present come what may I stand by Marama." Her hands came down by her sides, and closed involuntarily with the energy of resolve.

"You speak like an oracle, brave little princess, and I'm afraid . . . in the main . . . you are right." He had taken her hands, and pressed first one then the other to his lips.

Her sweet mouth quivered in a half mutinous smile. "If you *quite* agree with me now I shall think you don't really care so very much."

"I know one thing," he said, "it is heroic on my part to submit to this banishment, I do it solely as a duty to Marama, or I should feel as if my coming had robbed her of both her children."

"Don't be away too long, come back soon . . . and then never leave me again."

The few last bars of the symphony within finished pianissimo, the instrument was gently closed, a slim white figure advanced to the open window. "Was it fancy, or did I hear my name; what treason are you two plotting against Marama?"

They each took one of her hands, Edgar placed her in the chair from which he had risen.

"We want you to help us to scheme against this over-bearing Commodore, his guns have frightened the natives so that they seem quite dazed. Surawaia

trembles at every sound ; and now he calmly orders Edgar on board his ship to help him to prepare something or another for his Government. In Edgar's place would you not say, 'Sir, I have a Government of my own to look after, and must decline your proposal with thanks' in fact I should leave out the thanks."

Mary's auditors exchanged the smile it was impossible to repress at her readiness. Edgar only wished his uncle could see and hear her.

Marama replied ; "I think the invitation may be accepted as a great compliment, and it gives Edgar an opportunity of forming a good friendship, besides that, his influence may be useful for the future of Fiji ; he will not be away long, and we shall see how Vuni Valu manages when left to himself."

"The wheels of his chariot will run smoothly enough for a while," said Edgar "then of course England must take the reins."

"That means a bitter disenchantment for my poor old friend ; you know I have never approved of his being made King ; the settlers will throw him aside, directly they can do without him."

"Possibly, but believe me it was the one step to take. Our object was to keep the minor chiefs quiet and to gain time. That has been done, and after all, to gain one's object is the main point to a Briton."

"Right or wrong?" asked Mary tentatively.

"I should not like to say that, but rights are not too closely examined when natives are in question."

"These," said Mrs. Camden, "have not the staying power of the Maori, climate affects character no doubt, nor do I think they are so patriotic. The Maoris have fought with determined valour to retain at least a portion of their land, and have won a concession."

"You would not like to have a repetition of the New Zealand war here; later I am sure you will allow that enthroning Vuni Valu has staved off trouble for the white race."

"Time proves all things, I reserve my opinion, awaiting the result of your work on board the *Alert*."

On the morning he left, Edgar took leave of Mrs. Camden and Mary at the wicker gate, they did not go down to the landing stage to say adieu to the traveller. With the aid of the glass Mary watched his departure from the verandah, Marama standing beside her till the *Alert* was no longer visible. The glass came down directly, it was useless then, mechanically it was passed into Marama's extended hand. Mary's appealing eyes went up to hers. "To think that we shall hear nothing till he brings his own news! Edgar said so himself."

"That sounds as if he would be with us very soon,

also no opportunity of sending letters is likely to occur just now darling; then the *Alert's* movements are not to be made public, for good reasons of State no doubt."

"How dreadful partings are," said Mary "you say good-bye, and may never meet again! I understand now what you feel Marama, but you always work on." The girl's lovely white throat gave a few convulsive throbs as she bravely gulped down her distress, and turned into the room to resume the work she had left. Taking up a pair of scissors she began to cut out *sulus* and pinafores for the children who were under Père Joseph's instruction. Marama was sewing garments for the grown-up children, she cast a few anxious glances at the table where the scissors were going somewhat rashly. Printed calico was very precious, but she decided to sacrifice material rather than leave the deft fingers, which were guiding them, without employment.

Her generous wisdom was rewarded, she found on a subsequent inspection, that they had made no mistakes; happily native garments were of simple design, for as Mary's scissors travelled briskly over yards of 'print' her mind was sailing away in the battleship's wake.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### VUNI VALU PAYS A VISIT.

ONE morning Vuni Valu was descried in the distance, making his way to the bungalow, in great state, a large retinue in attendance. Any unusual demonstration from the natives now made Marama's heart beat faster: she hastened within to exchange her simple morning frock for a rather more elaborate costume; it was necessary to appear with all the dignity possible. Knowing that it would impress the chieftain more if she had an attendant of her own rank, she reluctantly called, "Mary."

The summons was obeyed with joyful alacrity.

"Keep close beside me," Marama directed, "if I sit down take a seat also."

"I am glad you have let me come," was all Mary had time to say before Vuni Valu stepped on the verandah, with the greeting, "*Sai yandra* Marama, Levu, good morning, great lady."

She replied courteously inviting her royal visitor and the white interpreter into her drawing-room. It

was distinctly understood that the followers were not to cross the threshold ; the Camdens drew the line of etiquette rigidly there, exacting this mark of respect from the native population.

The king's fancy was taken by the pretty room, his observant eyes scanned it carefully while his suite subsided into easy attitudes on the verandah, and gazed through the open windows.

A few civilities were exchanged within the apartment, succeeded by the customary pause, which to Marama seemed endless.

The white interpreter at last said pleadingly, "Could we speak to you alone?"

In obedience to a look from Mrs. Camden, Mary quietly passed into another room ; a thunder-cloud gathered on the king's brow as he watched her depart and close the door behind her. His imperative gesture urged the interpreter,—a young merchant from the township—to dally no longer.

"Why is he here?" Marama asked in English.

"He considers that some sort of atonement should be made because of Matafu."

Marama's countenance changed ; she had not been able to shake off the feeling that some indemnity would be required at their hands ; in all human probability Rupert's life would have been the forfeit, he had, providentially, she thought, been removed



from that danger and her fears had passed away. Now, what did this unwonted visit portend!

"What does he want?" she asked.

"Nothing for himself, his son, Musandroka, is concerned in the matter."

"What has *he* to do with it?" was the next rapid question. Marama's look said, do put me out of suspense, and continue conventionalities afterwards.

"*Ratu* Musandroka wishes," began the interpreter. Vuni Valu nodded twice in acknowledgement of the prefix *Ratu* (gentleman). "*Ratu* Musandroka would be most happy . . . that is to say . . . he would consider himself highly honoured . . . and the king his father would be extremely gratified . . ." the interpreter finished his speech in English—"The fact is Mrs. Camden, absurd and monstrous as the request is, Vuni Valu has come, I have had to obey him so far as to pretend to go through the form of proposal, to ask that your adopted daughter may be given in marriage to his son."

Deep stillness fell upon the conclave when the interpreter ceased to speak. In silence Mrs. Camden rose, her figure was drawn to its full height; she was not tall, but she looked imposing; the half-puzzled expression in her splendid eyes changed to a flame of indignation which also tinged her pale cheeks with becoming colour; her curved nostrils and firm lips

told of an aroused spirit that knew neither fear nor hesitation. Her gesture, as she stood with right arm outstretched and pointing finger, was irresistible, it *would* be obeyed; her eyes only swerved from the king's to indicate to him more emphatically the way of exit.

He too had risen astonished at the transformation of her countenance. The pair were thus confronted for a few seconds, half the length of the room between them.

No word was spoken on either side. Still pointing she advanced upon the king, one regal step. He backed one, she took another, so did he; one more, then Vuni Valu swung himself fiercely round, and strode out through the window, across the verandah and away; his giant frame erect, his turbaned head held high, never a glance did he deign to cast behind him.

As for the white interpreter he too disappeared from the room; quickly he found his way out by the door, and nimbly followed the retreating monarch.

Amazement held the attendants spell-bound, riveted to their places; until with eyes still glowing, Marama took up her strong fan of plaited cocoa-nut fibre, and began to clear a passage on the verandah right and left, the astonished natives giving way before her. This was the sight Mary beheld when she stood in

the door-way wondering what had happened. She did not stop to inquire. Example was enough for her, she could not remain an inert witness of the sally; seizing a larger fan she set to work to brush out the bewildered Fijians, who then realized that for some cause or another their presence was unwelcome, and allowed themselves to be wafted off the domain. They moved away *en queue* to rejoin their chief, uttering deep musical murmurs of interrogation one to another as they left, swaying through the trees in a long brown column.

When all were out of sight, Marama turned to the young girl, "Mary! what have we done?"

Marama's pallor was not altogether the result of her unwonted exertion; it was caused by her emotions. The sudden gust of indignation had cooled, she now thought of the danger of reprisals. Mary could not repress her smiles, two rows of small square teeth were visible, pearly white, mirthful dimples heightened the animation of her face.

"I don't know what it is all about, but we have given them a lesson they are not likely to forget; now we must sit up all night to watch lest they should set fire to the house."

"We may watch and yet not be safe. Their fire-brands keep alight for hours in a smouldering condition; they may shoot one into the roof, and

we not know of its presence till the first breeze fans it into flame. I think, Mary, that a letter must be written at once to the king, and another interview demanded."

Mary opened large eyes of inquiry. "He will never come," she said; "how did they offend you, Marama?"

"Don't speak of it. The truth is they cannot forget that Matafu chose his own death rather than submit to the white man's law. The worst part of the affair is that Vuni Valu's respect for me will be lessened, if he saw me drive off his retinue. Chiefs have no regard for persons who act upon impulse, and cannot master their feelings. But what an outrage! I do not see that I could have acted otherwise; how dare that interpreter bring the king to me on such an errand! I must take high ground, and make clear to Vuni Valu the absolute superiority of our race over his."

A letter was composed in Mrs. Camden's brain as she paced up and down her pretty room, growing quite eloquent in Fijian metaphor; she had to apply to Mary occasionally to round off a phrase and give it a more magniloquent turn.

The document was a work of time, every word had to be carefully weighed; when it was finished Marama was satisfied that it was a triumph of diplomacy: the missive was despatched by special messenger.

The response he brought was verbal—a single word, “*Malua*” (wait a while).

Mary could read her foster-mother’s face like a book; she saw that Marama was alarmed. “Do not mind,” she said, “we have lived long enough in Fiji to expect this: you know natives never allow themselves to be hurried; *Malua* is their motto under all circumstances. Vuni Valu is too brave to hurt us, besides, he is bound to be polite while the English battle-ship is in these seas.” Mary’s cheeks were tinted like the wild rose, and unconsciously she drew up her slender neck.

Rupert’s revolver was taken into his mother’s sleeping apartment where the two ladies decided to pass the night. Mary calmly held it in one hand, and a long, pointed knife in the other.

“Which will you have?” she asked.

Marama took the knife, “I am more sure of this.”

“I am glad, because I prefer the revolver.”

“Your hand is steadier than mine, Mary, and your aim more true, I never could succeed in throwing a stone straight for any distance.”

Mary levelled the weapon, glancing along the uppermost barrel. “Rupert was afraid of arousing suspicion among the natives or he would have given me more practice, but I can hit a bottle easily now. Hark, what is that?” she finished in a whisper.

A gentle crackling could be heard overhead as if some light object were moving warily through dry reeds which thatched the roof.

Marama extinguished the lamp while Mary stole noiselessly over the floor, having slipped off her canvas shoes ; she drew aside a corner of the reed mat that had been lowered over the windows, and strained her eyes into the dark expanse.

Fireflies darted here and there, they were the only signs of life.

Mary's next move was to ascend a short ladder placed against the inside wall, till she reached a cross-beam : standing upright thereon, she placed an ear to the thatch, and listened intently for some minutes.

Marama groped her way to the foot of the ladder to receive Mary's report.

The girl came down like a fairy. "Only land-crabs," was her reassuring murmur, delivered in a tone of contempt for the repulsive, but harmless visitants that she declared were exploring the roof. "I can't believe we are in any real danger after all, Marama ; think of the years we have spent here without protection from any Government."

"I know, child, and the condition was safer ; now that the white settlers and merchants have recognised Vuni Valu as their king, he seems to have lost his head

altogether; there are no bounds to his pretension! And it is merely stratagem on the part of the whites, to flatter him into acceding to whatever they propose."

"Well, he would never injure us, he took your dismissal meekly enough; let us trust our lives to God, and go to sleep."

"Rest, dear girl, you must be tired, I shall watch."

"No, lie down beside me, Timmie and Lusio will warn us if they hear footsteps."

The native servants were already wrapped in slumber stretched on mats in the verandah, their necks propped on slender wooden stools by way of pillows.

No sleep visited Mrs. Camden's eyelids, she was too much disturbed by the king's ambiguous message. "*Malua*" sounded like a threat in her ears, she spent some miserable hours watching, listening, waiting for the worst. At dawn Lusio and Timmie awoke, she heard them exchanging a few words in low tones, as they stretched their lithe limbs and rose to their feet.

Nothing unusual seemed to have happened, their steps were directed towards the cook-house where ordinary preparations had to be made for the mistress's keen supervision.

Timmie remembered that a dish of *vakalolo* was to form one of the courses for dinner that day; the delicacy needed half a day's labour according to Fijian calculation.

Cocoa-nuts must be gathered. Timmie strolled away to the nearest clump of palms; catching the stem of the finest tree with both hands, he bent his back and planted the soles of his feet also upon the stem; then raising one hand over the other, he ascended to the top. When he had plucked and thrown down enough fruit for his purpose, he lowered himself with monkey-like ease, and reclined comfortably resting on his elbows. After a while he went down to the beach with easy, swinging strides. There he chose shells, fringed with sharp indentations; these he would use for grating the cocoa-nut. His store of *masawi* to make the sweet sauce was already collected, but there was something else to procure.

Timmie required a pile of fresh banana leaves by his side when engaged in culinary operations. He would not even take a peeled yam in his fingers, he would use a leaf for everything he touched; his daintiness in preparing food almost rivalled that of a French *chef de cuisine*.

He had safely deposited his spoils, when he saw three powerful natives approaching the homestead with swift elastic tread. The man who walked first was of commanding presence, his elaborate *sulu* proclaimed high rank.

"Musandroka!" was the name Timmie breathed out wonderingly.



Then Timmie bent humbly to the earth, using his hands as supplementary feet, when he drew near in obedience to a sign from the Prince. This was court etiquette for servants. Musandroka signed to a follower who then handed Timmie a long bamboo, the split end of which held a letter.

Musandroka told Timmie to take it to his mistress at once. The three messengers then turned and departed; when they had reached a certain distance Timmie straightened himself, and hurried in with the reed; the responsibility of removing the letter was left to Marama, not for worlds would he have handled so incomprehensible a mystery.

Marama waited till her servant had retired before she opened it, and read the contents in silence. It was from Vuni Valu's present interpreter, and ran thus:

"Vuni Valu consents to another interview. I did not expect to be able to persuade him, but his curiosity is aroused. He is astounded at your treatment of him yesterday and wishes for an explanation. I fear he is influenced by the idea that you have reconsidered the matter. Please be prepared for this. I beg you to forgive my involuntary share in this annoyance, it is forced upon me by our defenceless state. We must keep up appearances for a short time longer when H.M.S. *Alert*, will be round again and bring Vuni to his senses."

In the course of the day the king appeared; his second visit was paid with less outward ceremony, he dispensed with the attendance of his regular suite, and was accompanied by the interpreter, and three other subordinate *Tankies* (proprieters of land inherited by right of birth, of conquest, or gift,) who remained stationed some forty yards distant from the bungalow.

Marama noticed their presence with mingled feelings of anger and alarm: the situation she felt was becoming serious.

While the king's audience was held in the reception room, Mary was shut within her own little apartment where she could neither see nor hear aught that passed.

Marama began at once, she told Vuni Valu, with great dignity, that "white people do not ally themselves in marriage with blacks."

"Musandroka is not black," said the king with laconic severity.

"He is, I admit, of a clear shade of brown; but that makes no difference to our law, which binds us to those of our own race."

Vuni Valu threw back his head.

"The words that you speak to me are not those of truth; in this very *koro* (town) of white people is one who was married, according to your rite, by the black-robed *katolika*, to one of ours."

Unfortunately for Marama's argument Vuni Valu

alluded to a recent case of a settler who had made a daughter of the soil his wife. Marama rose from her seat in a sort of majestic desperation.

"Listen O King, we know nothing of the customs of *kaisis*" (common folk)—she hissed the contemptuous epithet through her teeth with effective disdain—"my daughter is a Princess and must wed a Prince of her own race" . . . "And colour," the interpreter added.

Vuni Valu stood up. "Marama, what you say of the white man who married one of ours may be true, but he is not of a common sort. I cannot judge as with my own people. With *kaisis* we have nothing to do. My son could not be of higher rank, for he is Musandroka, *Tui Vili!* chief of Fiji."

In dire perplexity Mrs. Camden turned to the interpreter whom as yet she had scarcely appeared to notice. A happy thought came to her relief.

"I must tell him," she said in a low voice, and in her own language "that my daughter is already engaged. Betrothals according to Fijian law are sacred; when the match is arranged by parents who have a mutual friendship. For instance, one says "my boy shall marry your girl," nothing can break that agreement if made by the heads of two families. I shall tell him that this has been done in my daughter's case."

The interpreter bowed acquiescence.

Marama proceeded to explain. Vuni Valu listened deferentially.

"But," he objected, "if she does not wish to become the wife of him who was betrothed to her in childhood, she can say 'I refuse,' and after that refusal she is not bound."

"You know, O King, by the law of your country that if she refuses the husband chosen, she can marry *no other*. Besides she has not refused, nor does she intend."

Great solemnity overspread Vuni Valu's countenance, he remained for some moments silent, his eyes fixed upon the ground.

"I have sworn," he said, at length, "that our custom of early betrothals shall be discontinued henceforth. The white man has persuaded me. But the betrothals made for this generation must stand. If the maiden is pledged; I have no more to say. Let us go."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SUSPENSE, AND THE SEQUEL.

EDGAR had been gone nearly three months, and no word of him had reached the bungalow. It was the dead season as far as shipping was concerned, the harbour was well-nigh deserted ; a small craft would occasionally beat in for such shelter as she could find, warned by a rapid fall of the barometer that her safety was menaced. Still there had been no "heavy blow," until one morning when a devastating hurricane swept over some of the islands. It was strangely partial, striking with terrific violence in places and leaving others comparatively untouched. Levuka came in for what sailors termed the fag-end of it. In some parts of the group whole plantations of cocoa-nut palms were destroyed, perhaps one tree in fifty left standing ; dwelling houses were beaten flat to the ground, loss of life and property very severe. Native villages close to the sea suffered most, many were washed away by the tidal wave which burst over the low-lying lands, when the "centre" of the hurricane passed over Fiji.

Happily it was daylight, so natives living near the

(180)

beach about Levuka saw their share of the wave coming, and leaving their huts rushed up Marama's hill, where they threw themselves down scared and shivering. The wind was terrible enough, it could be heard in the distance tearing at the huge leaves of rocking palms, while all was yet still at the homestead. On it came till it struck the house with a roar.

Strongly built and well sheltered, the bungalow and its dependencies stood firm. When the tumult subsided, faithful Timmie was sent forth to bring native men, women and children under Marama's hospitable shelter.

Hot tea, warm wraps, biscuits, and tinned meats were served out to them. Marama and *Melili* got together all the clothing they could muster to cover the poor shivering creatures who had lost everything. Blankets were wrapped round the half-dead old women, one young mother with an infant an hour old was carried in, she was brave as a lion, and insisted upon sharing little comforts which were prepared for her, with the children round. Had the tidal wave come at night all would have perished, but as Marama said to Père Joseph next day, "By God's blessing all are safe in life and limb."

The new garments were brought into instant use as if they had been made ready for the event, and delighted the recipients.

The next day dawned clear, bright and beautiful, vivid sunshine warmed every heart, acting like magic upon the native temperament. Except for the wrecked vegetation, it was almost impossible to believe the deep blue vault of heaven, so gloriously remote, could ever have harboured a cloud. Everybody agreed that the elements had done their worst for that year, people could settle down in peace, and see nature quickly repair a large portion of the damage wrought, but to some of the cotton planters it spelt ruin.

Life seemed doubly sweet to those natives who had so nearly lost it, their gratitude to the great lady who had ministered to them in their necessity, was touching. The young mother walked up to thank Marama for having, as she expressed it, "saved the life of herself and child."

A hum of rejoicing was in the air, but when need for action ceased, Mary's heart sank with an undefined fear very foreign to her experience. Marama began to look concerned, news might be brought in any day now, what would the tidings be? Many times she scanned the horizon when Mary's lustrous eyes were otherwise employed. The great ship might surely reappear at any moment. In expectation the days went by. Then came a startling word.

Père Joseph appeared, the hand which was hidden in the breast of his old cassock held a letter; Mrs.

Camden was bending over a plot of ground cultivating what was left of her treasured plants. "I have a word to say to you," he began, after his first courteous salutation, "can we speak here without interruption?"

"Will you come in-doors out of the heat," she asked, "Mary has taken Surawaia and gone for a sail."

"Madame! I do not think it is safe for them."

"Mon père, the sea is calm as a mirror, Mary is so used to it, and Surawaia is an expert with the paddle."

"All the same I would not let them go alone, it is not as if Rupert were here."

"I thought the exertion and movement would refresh her spirit; this silence is beginning to tell on her."

"Ah! have you not received news of our good Edgar Devon?" he inquired as they walked towards the house.

"No word has come from him yet."

"But that is strange, for why should not the same letter-bag which brought this, have contained also a letter for Mlle. Marie, or for you?"

"Mon père, what has happened? You have come to prepare us for a catastrophe? Anything is better than suspense, let me hear the worst."

"No, no, be tranquil, all is well; the *Alert* is now in Melbourne harbour for repairs, she sustained some damage, although well out to sea, and not near the centre of the cyclone. This letter is from a French



sailor who was invalided here, and taken on in the British ship."

Marama's voice was silent, her questioning eyes spoke for her.

"He does not mention Monsieur Devon, but that is not extraordinary; he merely says the ship's course was ordered for the Australian port—the seat of Government—after leaving Samoa. The Commodore's reason for reporting himself there would not be given to the crew."

"It could not have prevented Edgar from coming on himself in the vessel which brought your letter."

"Hélas, that is true; unless illness, or some other cause detained him."

"Yes," she said pensively, "we must give him time, and wait."

"If there is one virtue more than another we learn to practise in Fiji, it is patience," he added, with his wonderful smile, telling of so many hopes deferred. "You, Madame, know the lesson well, but it is difficult for the child, *pauvre chère enfant*. Let us have confidence in God, and say nothing to her yet. In uncertainty always hope for the best; if he is alive, Edgar Devon will give proof of the faith that is in him, he is a reliable man."

It was nine o'clock at night when a battered little

vessel, lighted by moonbeams, crept cautiously within the half-circle of coral reefs, and dropped her anchor unperceived. An hour afterwards Timmie was awakened from his first sound sleep by a footstep near the cook-house.

The door was gently opened, a voice whispered  
“Are you there, Timmie?”

“*Eo, saka.*” (Yes, sir.)

“There is light in Marama’s sitting-room, go and tell her I have come.”

“*Eo, saka.*”

In a moment Timmie’s elaborately-dressed head was lifted from the slender bamboo stool which formed his pillow, he strode the few yards between himself and the sitting-room window, and knocked upon it in his own peculiar style. A soft foot-fall came close to the other side. “Is that you, Timmie?”

“Yes, Marama.”

“Who wants me?”

“The stranger.”

“What stranger? Give his name.”

“It is the man Devalo.”

A vibration of strong, but subdued excitement was in the tones which next asked :

“Is he here?”

“Yes, Marama.”

“Show him in at once.”

The door was opened wide. Edgar sprang upon the verandah, passed Timmie, and stood within the lamp-lit room.

The native remained outside not presuming to enter the house until further orders were given. Native memory retains all it hears and sees with marvellous precision. Timmie reported afterwards to his subordinates "there was *reki-reki*," (joy.)

He heard a joyous exclamation, a light sweep of skirts over the matted floor, a short silence, gentle voices, a ripple of happy laughter in which Marama joined.

Timmie had heard no such hilarity since the old days when the young Turanga came home, and there was talk and laughter together in soft tones like those. He resented it now because his Turanga was not there. Why were Marama and Melili so pleased to welcome Devalo! Not so handsome as he used to be either, he was thin and starved.

"I left the *Alert*," Edgar explained, "at Samoa. Commodore Bracebridge found that he could not return here for an indefinite time; I was impatient as you may suppose. It so happened that a small schooner was getting underway for Levuka, I very quickly boarded her, little guessing the run of bad luck in store; no! let me take back that expression, it is a remnant of my paganism: little guessing the extraordinary mercy which was to follow us. These poor

fellows on the small craft sail without a proper chart; we were blown quite out of our course, the skipper lost his bearings, he had no notion where he was after the "big blow." Provisions ran short, we were put on a meagre ration of salt beef and biscuit which dwindled each day, till starvation threatened unless we could make our port. Over and over again we were doomed to be broken up on unknown coral reefs, but it was just as if some one was pleading for our lives, winning for us hairbreadth escapes. The rough sailors began to connect this in a way with me, they have strange fancies! and they treated me with a new sort of respect, very rugged, but sincere. When things looked brighter, the skipper observed to me: "'Pears like as if you *was not* to be drowned on this *air* trip.' The following evening our anchor chain was paid out in Levuka harbour, and I have come up here as quickly as I could!"

Mary and Edgar were too intent upon each other to notice the rapt expression that gradually came over Marama's mobile countenance as she listened. Her memory, like that of her native servant, had flown instinctively to Rupert. She was thinking within herself that . . . the sacrifice had been accepted . . . and that her son's petitions had already found favour in the sight of God.

Edgar was still talking, telling Mary of Samoa and

of incidents of his tour among the islands. "There is something," he said, "so serenely beautiful in these South Sea Islands, it seems to lift one's heart into the realms of poetry. One forgets the fierce, hard world beyond, where the law of strife prevails, where man's chief object is to oust his fellow-man socially, politically, commercially, just as if the message of 'Peace on earth' had never been spoken——"

"To men of good-will," said Mary, "are n't there any left?"

Edgar smiled. "Let us hope they are not extinct—but they are very much in the minority; I don't know how it is," he continued, "but lately beneath this loveliness, there seems to be an undercurrent of melancholy, which is beginning to affect me. Mary! what a day of joy when I can take you away."

So it was that quiet bridal preparations were begun "just for ourselves," Edgar suggested, but the very leaves seemed to whisper the tidings that there was to be a marriage in the Catholic Church.

On hearing it Vuni Valu pondered. Marama had *not* deceived him, he had always found her true; he was content, because *Edala*, *tamata ndina* was the bridegroom elect: but *Edala* had said that this was his first visit to these shores, how then about the early betrothal? It must have been arranged on paper by

one of those weird messages that the white man could send so far.

The king set all his most artistic 'hands' to work upon a splendid mat to be offered on the occasion.

It would be difficult to portray a more exquisite picture than Mary Sinclair on her wedding morn; she carried her seventeen summers with the unconscious dignity of an empress. Marama had allowed no stooping or slouching in her children; perhaps the grand native physique had been an object lesson to her; Mary's shoulders were moulded on noble lines, her slender neck supported the beautiful head, now slightly bending; her fine figure was set off by her simple dress of soft white muslin—she had worn nothing richer in all her life. A diaphanous veil enveloped her like a mist of gossamer. There were no flowers on her head or on her dress. It would have been too much like the natives, who bedeck themselves profusely and very tastefully, with them on gala days. The bouquet of fresh-gathered orange blossoms she carried in her hand.

It was a marriage Mass, very early in the morning, so after all, only Catholics were there. Mrs. Camden gave the bride away, she would depute that office to no other. She fulfilled it as a sacred duty to John and Nina Sinclair, whose orphan babe had found a refuge and protection in Marama's mother-heart, cherished

there as if the child had been her own, ever since the cruel death of its young parents.

Père Joseph was vested before the altar, his small acolytes were arrayed in new red cassocks, and laced cottas, which Monseigneur had brought with him: they were the work of charitable French fingers, made in *la belle France* for Poor Foreign Missions. The boys' brilliant round eyes followed the proceedings with devout solemnity.

Edgar was waiting, his elegant back turned towards the door, until a kind of satisfied flutter among the expectant congregation proclaimed that Mary was coming.

A deep tinge of colour spread slowly in each of his bronzed cheeks when he turned to see her advance, her hand clasped in one of Marama's. Strange indeed if her aspect produced no evidence of emotion in him, for it fastened upon her the attention of every other witness. Before taking her place beside him, she lifted her eyes to his, as if to ask a triumphant refutation of the doubt which had once been cast upon the depth and stability of his affection, by Rupert whose opinion in most things she had valued, whose memory remained, though now he was as completely out of her life as if he were in another world.

Edgar's greeting seemed like an answer to her unspoken question.

"You are graven on my heart for ever, just as I see you now," he breathed.

Then they knelt and the solemn rite began.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once again all was bright in the homestead as youth and happiness could make it. Daily excursions were planned and made, curios and trophies collected to adorn Edgar's 'study' in England.

Timmie forgot his grievances, and was proud to be taken with Lusio in attendance on these delightful jaunts by sea or by land. On the sweet, cool evenings, Marama was an entertaining listener, entering into all projects; she was so charming, the others almost forgot she was not as young as themselves. But all things come to an end, the days were slipping away, Edgar and Mary were getting ready for the first stage of their voyage 'home.'

Mrs. Camden had an answer ready to meet their anxiety about her future whenever the subject was broached.

"I shall be too much occupied to be dull," she said, "and as for companionship I have always my memories and my hopes; besides, as the poor Bryans have lost so much I shall invite them to make the



bungalow their home for a time ; we shall have enough to eat, and there is plenty of room."

She was brave to the last farewell ; it was spoken in her home ; she remained there with the feeling that it was easier to see Mary and Edgar go, than to return without them to the empty place. She was not entirely forsaken. Their ship was scarcely out of harbour before a letter to her from Rupert was brought in by Père Joseph. But before it came to rejoice her heart, she had tasted lees in her cup of desolation.

Beneath the deserted roof—silent as the grave!—she would not have recalled her son even if she might, but the others, whose voices and footsteps so lately made the music of her life, oh, where were they !

At that moment they were standing together on deck, their gaze fixed on one spot above the little town. The bungalow was yet visible against its background of tall palms, a mere speck fast fading from view, as the vessel bearing Mary and Edgar away swayed forward like an eager living creature towards the open sea.

An urgent question about the stowage of their belongings called him from her side for some minutes, when he impatiently returned Mary was nowhere to be seen.

A few rapid strides brought him to the cabin-door, it had been left carelessly half-open by whoever had

hurriedly entered. A finely-woven Fijian mat—Vuni Valu's parting gift—had been already spread upon the floor. Mary's graceful, lissom figure knelt upon it in the attitude he knew so well; she was leaning over a deck-chair as if it were occupied by another form.

"Marama, Marama . . . . how could I leave you! How *could* I do it!" was what he heard between her sobs.

He paused, hesitating upon the threshold; then went straight forward with tender solicitude, "My child . . . my Mary . . . what a tempest of sorrow."

"No . . . I'm so . . . *happy*; isn't it horrid of me . . . ? when *she*, Marama, is left . . . desolate."

"I quite understand; you know I love her too, very dearly; now that we have made a start we shall easily persuade her to follow us."

Mary's head, with its clustered tresses, gave a disconsolate shake; she had thrown off her hat, it was on the floor.

"If Marama *ever* leaves Fiji, it will be after Rupert is professed."

"She must not wait for that day, because it may never come. I do not see how he is going to get through the novitiate, after being his own master, and accustomed to live out of doors."

"Rupert will get through anything he attempts or he will die in the effort," said Mary.

"He will not be allowed to do that. If his superiors see that the discipline is too severe for him, he will get his *congé*, and have to take it whether he wants to, or not."

"That would be worse than all," she said, with a face of dismay.

Edgar looked a little astonished.

"It sounds heartless," she went on, "I really am surprised at myself for not feeling wretched! . . . but I know Marama will be disappointed if he does not succeed, and Rupert himself would hate to fail. Oh! there is no fear," she added confidently, "he does not feel privations acutely, as you would; he does not value his life much, he would risk it at any moment for anybody, and as to the world, he used to say it is a 'poor place.'"

"I should think so, poor fellow, as he only knows Fiji!"

"He has seen Australia, too, and despises it," she returned with emphasis, "he thinks more of New Zealand, it is his birthplace: but his indifference to the world comes from a deeper cause than we know, spiritual I mean: I believe it was there from the first only he could not find it out by himself. Look at me, we are quite unlike, I have never been out of Fiji—and now that we are really off I am rather frightened—yet to me life is so precious I cannot bear the

thought of giving it up!" She finished the sentence with a gasp.

"Be sure I shall keep you in life as long as I can," he said cheerily, then in tones of deep emotion, "we stand by each other to the last; be my good angel in this life, and a beautiful instrument to lead me to such thoughts of a better, that we may never part again. I promise you, dearest, that 'no man on your face shall see any grief, for change of mine.' Now listen, my sunbeam must not weep, come with me on deck."

"Yes, but don't let me look that way. I seemed to see her . . . there . . . alone . . . in the deserted house . . . it was too . . ." Mary's voice again broke.

"Levuka is out of sight now," he said very tenderly. "We will write to Marama from Melbourne, and persuade her to come, we will arrange the whole business for her, voyage, outfit, journey, everything; we shall be at home ourselves to receive her, and give her a real old English welcome. How proud I shall be when you show her the fine old place; it is worth having, Mary, although I did not value it properly till I began to picture you as its mistress. There! my plan is as good as settled; look up now, and tell me how I can be to you father, mother, husband and Marama, all in one?"

Mary lifted her bowed head, her beautiful eyes

sparkling like sapphires between the black curled fringes, she smiled up at him, her matchless smile, arch and radiant.

“You have just got to be *your own self*, that means all the world, to me.”

THE END.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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